Introduction to a Global Dialogue on Collaborative Archaeology

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ABSTRACT

Active collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders forces practitioners to rethink how and why we do archaeology, indeed even to question what archaeology is and can be. Drawing from a wide range of practitioners with different temporal and regional foci, this publication takes an international view of collaboration in archaeology. It presents global collaborative archaeology, both as a challenge to current practice and theory, and an impetus for the future. This piece by the editors of the volume provides some background on how this dialogue on collaborative archaeology came about and the questions that guided it.

Résumé: Une collaboration active avec une grande variété de parties prenantes impose aux praticiens de repenser comment et pourquoi nous faisons de l'archéologie, et même effectivement de s'interroger sur ce qu'est l'archéologie et ce qu'elle peut être. S'inspirant d'une grande variété de praticiens aux perspectives temporelles et régionales différentes, cette publication adopte un point de vue international de la collaboration dans l'archéologie. Elle présente l'archéologie collaborative mondiale tant comme un défi pour la pratique et la théorie en vigueur que comme un élan pour le futur. Cet article rédigé par les rédacteurs de l'ouvrage apporte quelques informations contextuelles sur la naissance de ce dialogue sur l'archéologie collaborative et les questions qui l'ont guidé.

Resumen: La colaboración activa con una amplia variedad de partes interesadas obliga a los profesionales a repensar cómo y por qué hacemos arqueología, incluso cuestionar qué es y qué puede ser la arqueología. A partir de una amplia gama de profesionales con diferentes enfoques temporales y regionales, esta publicación tiene una visión internacional de la colaboración en arqueología. Presenta la arqueología colaborativa global, tanto como un desafío para la práctica y la teoría actuales como un ímpetu

para el futuro. Este artículo de los editores del volumen proporciona algunos antecedentes sobre cómo surgió este diálogo sobre arqueología colaborativa y las preguntas que lo guiaron.

KEY WORDS

Collaborative research, Archaeological epistemology, Methodology, Inclusive practice

This special issue of *Archaeologies* began, like many collaborations, with a conversation. In this case, it was between editor Bonnie Clark and volume authors Meredith Chesson and Ian Kujit. All three are involved in collaborative archaeological practice in different areas of the world—the western USA, Italy, and Ireland, respectively. Discussing triumph and trials, interesting points of both convergence and dissonance emerged, as did one unifying principle: active collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders forces practitioners to rethink how and why we do archaeology, indeed even to question what archaeology is, can, and should be. Inspired by those first informal discussions, Clark and Chesson began brainstorming about how to widen the conversation to include practitioners engaged in similar work in more parts of the world and across a range of sectors: academic, public, private and voluntary. Any truly productive, critical conversation about the challenges, realities, and benefits of collaborative practice must take account of multiple perspectives, and be sensitive not just to geographic differences, but differences in training and theoretical standpoints (see the Chesson et al. article for more discussion). We sought out individuals whose work transcended publicly facing "community archaeology" through sustained engagement with multiple communities in truly collaborative fashion, and brought people together in a symposium at the 2017 meetings of the Society for American Archaeology. As hoped, the conversations were stimulating and productive, and demonstrated that any successful effort at truly collaborative practice must be rooted in genuine awareness and acknowledgment of local contexts, and founded upon mutual respect. Beyond those two principles, there is no one-size-fits-all model. Energized by these conversations, and provoked by recent critiques of inclusive archaeological practice (Gonzalez-Ruibal et al. 2018; La Salle and Hutchings 2018), participants readily agreed to the opportunity to further develop dialogue via publication. The result is this special issue, which concludes with a commentary by Alison Wylie. With a few personnel changes from that symposium, in particular Audrey Horning stepping up as co-editor, this volume builds on the synergy of that first set of papers.

Collaborative archaeological practice is not new, and this volume is certainly not the only publication to tackle this subject (eg Atalay 2012; Atalay et al. 2016; Colwell-Chanthaponh and Ferguson 2008; Nicholas et al. 2011). However, three important epistemic virtues underpin this collection. First, it productively builds on these existing conversations and publications, reflecting on the tenor, breadth, and practical challenges of collaborative practice. Solutions are proffered for some of the problems identified by other authors. For example, Nicholas et al. (2011, 25) noted that "archaeologists often do not know how to involve groups in the process of creating the research goals, methodological approaches and ultimate products" of archaeology. Authors in this volume present individual examples of how they have addressed this challenge. In some cases, the answer involves the incorporation of cultural protocols within field methodologies (see Dring et al., Atalay, Mrozowski and Gould, and Smith et al this volume) while elsewhere, research designs openly include and sensitively balance the requirements of a range of stakeholders, including institutions, public bodies, and businesses (see papers by Clark and Britt this volume). Second, the projects reported on here represent long-term commitments on the part of the archaeologists and collaborative partners, with some projects in their second decade. This perspective provides a strong footing for explicitly tackling criticisms levied against collaborative work (see articles by Greenberg, Sebastian Dring et al., Horning, and Atalay in particular). Third, because authors apply a range of models of practice in different regions and contexts, the volume as a whole both complicates and advances understandings of collaborative practice worldwide (see especially Smith et al., Chesson et al., and Shakour et al.).

To encourage synergy through the volume, authors were asked to frame their contributions around a set of key questions geared towards not only assessing success and failures, but around methods for operationalizing and further developing collaborative practice as normative for the discipline of archaeology.

How Does Archaeology Change with a Focal Shift from Product to Process?

Archaeology has long focused not on just discovery, but on outcomes, guided by specific legislation and regulations, grant and contract requirements, and publication responsibilities. But more often than not, our partners are more interested in the actual process of uncovering evidence from the past and the empowerment of participating as equals. And true equality of footing requires the permeability of boundaries between "professional" and "community member", recognizing the dynamism of co-production

that permits shifting roles and degrees of engagement. Paying attention to process enables flexibility and growth, as demonstrated in the Sebastian Dring et al., Mrozowski and Gould, and Smith et al. articles which include authors who transcend boundaries in being both community members and professionals. Similarly, attentiveness to process allows for greater honesty about the manner in which archaeologists too, develop and transform perspectives through broadening the conversation and learning from community experts.

By paying attention to process and product equally, other contributors to this volume are explicitly framing and creating spaces for social justice, whether that is responding to historic erasure (eg Mrozowski and Gould, Clark), exploring a more complicated history of current social fissions as part of peacebuilding (Horning), or confronting the structural violence that continues to impact Australian Indigenous communities (Smith et al.). Paying attention to process also requires paying serious attention to conflicting perspectives amongst our partners. For example, interest levels as well as concerns often vary by generation, an issue explicitly considered by Shakour et al., Chesson et al., and Clark. The shift from product to process, or the effort to maintain a balance between both approaches, inevitably introduces tension and conflict. Preferring to see tension as productive, authors are honest about the difficulties as well as the advantages, as noted particularly by Horning, who cannot employ the term collaborative in her work in Northern Ireland because of its negative political connotations, and by Greenberg, whose critical public engagement practice in Israel has to contend with the political co-option of much publicly facing heritage work.

Archaeologists must also be attuned to the reality that community partners, while valuing process, may have their own intended outcomes for any project that may be divergent from, or even incommensurate with, those of archaeologists as discussed by Chesson et al. and Mrozowski and Gould. Communication, honesty, and openness are critical, and there are times when it may be most ethically appropriate to redesign activities, or even to walk away from a project.

What Ontological and Epistemological Challenges and Promises Arise in this Work?

Both authority and authoring must be shared for this type of collaborative archaeology to be effective. Making space for a public voice for partners has typically been easier in public venues than in academic publications. This collection begins to challenge that standard through including several partners as authors and incorporating the voices of others via ethnography

and oral history. In accord with the precepts of an archaeology of listening (Schmidt and Kehoe 2019, 1), contributors agree that "Listening to our fellow humans living at or near our sites, or to those descended from ancestors who once frequented what we call sites, provides a wealth of knowledge about pasts that we could not otherwise understand or even be aware of'. Multivocality, better described here by Atalay as sympoiesis (after Haraway 2016), holds the promise of deeper, more critical understandings through the range of perspectives incorporated. However, multivocality has also been caricatured as giving all voices, even offensive voices, equal air time in what Gonzalez-Ruibal et al. (2018, 509) describe as "epistemic populism". That is explicitly and emphatically not what authors in this collection advocate. Key to any collaboration is the right of all parties to say no, a central tenet of the methodology laid out by Chesson et al. That right to say no also extends to archaeologists. Furthermore, archaeologists need to maintain degrees of professional authority as a significant contribution to partnership itself. Abdicating responsibility for permits and funding in the interest of some form of free-for-all multivocality, for example, would hardly be of use to anyone, as discussed in Shakour et al. And in some settings, such as those (US) federally mandated projects discussed by Britt, there are governmental limitations on the nature of collaborative practice. But professional authority is not the same as intellectual authority. And it is the intellectual authority that gains strength through including the voices of all of those engaged in a partnership. Ultimately, partnership means that all parties bring different expertise, and partnerships work best when the different kinds of contributions, skills and knowledge are identified and working methods and ethics agreed upon in full recognition of structural constraints.

How does Collaboration Destabilize and Invigorate Method and Theory?

It is clear that collaborative practice is indeed a form of praxis, one that explicitly combats the myth of value-free science through application of an ethically sound scientific research design. The ethics of knowledge making as well as ownership of the past are core preoccupations. Archaeology was borne of colonialism and imperialism and has a well-documented history of replicating colonialist practices into the present. But changing practice in the present to be more inclusive is not just some knee jerk reaction to postcolonial angst, or a deliberate slide down the slippery slope of relativism. It quite simply, as put by Clark in her article, makes better science for the simple reason that in being more inclusive, we are able to tap into a much broader and deeper evidence base. This is a fundamental point,

and one that is often lost in debates over collaborative practice undermining "proper science". In actuality, as our discussant Alison Wylie noted in (2015, 207), such practice represents an "epistemic obligation rooted in norms of critical engagement that are constitutive of scientific enquiry".

Authors in this volume demonstrate how engagement destabilizes entrenched modes of archaeological practice by exposing and challenging the ideological frameworks that underwrite our discipline (Greenberg) and shape public notions of "the past" (Smith et al.). Yet at the same time that is destabilizes, it also inspires. Case studies expose how collaborative work leads to innovative practices, often led by community partners. A good example is provided by Britt, as she discusses how two indigenous Nations partnered together to successfully argue for a site banking preservation strategy to offset development-driven site mitigation. Others come from the synergy of working together, such as the Eastern Pequot produced resource book described by Sebastian Dring, et al.

What are the Best Ways to Train a New Generation of Practitioners in Collaboration?

After having wrestled with the ethics and challenges and rationales for collaborative archaeological practice, the next challenge is to set out ways forward to help ensure that such practice becomes embedded within the field as a whole. Education and training are critical, yet, as discussed by Greenberg in this volume, still often lacking within university settings. For some, training can best be achieved through the traditional medium of the field school serving as the natural vanguard for a paradigmatic shift towards collaborative practice (Silliman 2008). As Lightfoot (2008, 126–127) suggests, collaborative field schools "provide a dynamic context to contemplate the significant issues facing the practice of archaeology today." Ideally, collaborative field projects involving students mean they can learn through practice that many people, not just professionals, are central to understanding heritage in its broadest meaning. Atalay explicitly discusses forms of education in her article, noting that teaching collaborative practice is not just good for future archaeologists, it can be a key to more enlightened liberal education. In other cases, the involvement and empowerment of adult community members is the most effective way forward. Teaching and training relies on expertise, and the exercise of authority. But authority comes in many forms, and changes over time. Capacity building with partners empowers them to develop their own projects and train others. Capacity building and inclusivity also can build trust between institutions and communities, which by extension can foster a greater openness to

engagement and partnership (see Smith et al.). One way or another, as acknowledged by Greenberg, practice is key.

What Changes to Institutional Structures will be Required for Collaborative Archaeology to Reach Its Full Potential?

Greenberg asks his readers a particularly difficult question: How do we "change archaeological desire?" This is a key issue if collaborative work is to be recognized and rewarded. It is also critical if we are to avoid having collaborative work get co-opted for neoliberal policies in the service of governmental administration. Yet, it may just be administrators who have the greatest capacity for employing collaboration to decolonize their day-to-day workings. That is the prospect investigated by Britt in her article.

Concluding Thoughts

Collaborative archaeology is not easy. Collaborative archaeology is divisive within the discipline, and challenging on the ground. As demonstrated by the articles that follow, no project ever goes fully to plan. Collaborative projects can take years to develop, and they require a level of dedication from the professional archaeologists that take them on far beyond that typically expected. There are brick walls that are routinely hit, be they pragmatic (finance, permits, legal frameworks), or ethical (whose voice should be heard, how decisions are made). Timetables can take a real beating. The more voices at the table, the more potential for discord. Sometimes (see Horning this volume) inclusive practice carries real risk of harm, when the pasts we seek to inclusively recover may not be what one group expects to find. Pasts are painful too, as illustrated by the work at the Amache internment camp (Clark this volume), and not everyone wants to revisit a traumatic past. The authors here do not all agree on the specifics of practice or the right steps to take in overcoming challenges and dealing with ethical and practical dilemmas. We are confident, however, that the diversity of experiences and the lessons make for a stimulating set of conversations that will contribute measurably to ongoing dialogue and debate around the way forward for empirically honest, ethically robust, inclusive archaeological practice for the twenty-first century.

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