Imagined Authority: Archaeologists and the Myth of Power

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This issue has been inspired by two sessions entitled: *Imagined Authority: Archaeologists and the Myth of Power* and *Archaeological Uncertainty, a Journey Through the Ruins of a Discipline* held at EAA in Maastricht (2017) and Barcelona (2018), respectively. These sessions were conceptualised and organised by Małgorzata Trelka, Sarah Howard and Kiara Beaulieu. Our interest in policy research drew our group together, and the sessions grew organically from conversations reflected in our scholastic lives as PhD candidates at the University of Birmingham. Our interests in the theme of authority (who is in charge) in heritage practice and archaeological anxieties (why are we doing this) are rooted in our professional backgrounds.

Trelka's research is inspired by her experience working with heritage policy, state bureaucracy and UNESCO Conventions. Her research focuses on the role of (local) communities in the World Heritage process. Howard's research took a critical discourse approach to heritage managemnt literature and planning policy in England. Beaulieu explores the potential for the development of policies and volunteer reporting schemes regulating metal detection globally but with a focus in Canada.

These two parallel themes quickly manifested themselves as interconnected during the discussions questioning the authority of heritage experts and allowed the editors to explore the power relations in various facets of heritage work and archaeology.

Power, both perceived and real, helps define relationships and codes of conduct in both our social and professional lives. There has been a long-held belief that archaeologists hold authority and power as they are often seen as the representatives of government administration and cultural heritage institutions and more generally as guardians of archaeological sites and collections. As a reaction to what Laurajane Smith later characterised as the 'Authorized Heritage Discourse' (Smith 2006), archaeologists in the 1980s started to take a more democratic and interactive approach to cultural heritage. The identification and critique of the AHD were pivotal in accelerating changes to the ways in which professionals made archaeology and cultural heritage more representative and, in a sense, 'user-friendly.' This created a tidal wave of interest in a discipline that was once thought

of as out of reach of the everyday person. We ask if archaeologists hold the kind of power, authority and influence we are led to believe they do?

This issue seeks to deconstruct the authority of heritage professionals by reflecting on where we are now as a discipline in social, economic and political transition. While this is potentially an exciting period of discovering what it means to do archaeology in the 21st century, it is also a source of uncertainty and anxiety for practitioners. Specifically, what is their role within globalised and localised agendas and how they might challenge prejudices and biases in relation to what is considered heritage.

The main focus of this volume is to deal with ambiguity or the 'myth' of power relations within and its discursive construction in archaeological heritage management and the wider heritage sector. Each author has explored a certain facet of this theme, its ambiguity, and in some cases perilous, ideas of authority. The papers will share a common theme; they investigate formal heritage frameworks and the kinds of power dynamics they create—both in reality and as idealism. Each contribution is framed within the ongoing discussion reflecting on the role of national and international heritage policies; in the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous peoples, descendant communities and different interest groups in identification; interpretation and management of their heritage resources. The authors help to draw attention to what those policies do and how they work in practice. The papers consider how they impact on communities and whether they actually reflect and represent them as promised. Although the topic of authority of heritage workers and the critical assessments are not new, this issue will hopefully bring a fresh examination by including case studies from different cultural contexts.

Heritage Bureaucracies

All the contributors describe different power dynamics between those who work within governmental structures and implement heritage laws and policies through the machinery of heritage bureaucracy—associated often with the *authoritative* West. This system has been critiqued as not applicable in non-European contexts, because it is biased towards archaeological, historical, aesthetic and scientific values (Pwiti and Mvenge 1996) as opposed to being focussed on emotional and immaterial aspects of those places and objects. In Europe, for example, while there are many communities and individuals with an interest in heritage, they seem unable to make themselves heard or meaningfully contribute to a public discourse about heritage management. This means that the 'Western' system of heritage bureaucracy which claims to be inclusive in modern democratic societies and critiqued as incompatible in non-European contexts is often

negotiated in countries where it originated from (see Karl, Trelka in this volume). The decision-making power in the modern democracies is supposed to come from 'the people' through elected politicians. Karl tells us to what extend democratically elected politicians influence public interest in heritage. In his view, the language of 'public benefit' that heritage professionals seem to use, especially those working in heritage resource management, is little more than a rhetorical device to make arguments which will benefit heritage professionals and their professional interests. He draws the reader to the origins of the notion of public benefit in order to demonstrate parallels and explore the theme of power. This provides the reader with a strong understanding of how respective governments in Austria and Germany use their 'authority' to balance the interests of their citizens. Karl showcases the true intention of heritage workers in these two countries and questions whether the policies which regulate archaeological practice are indeed for the 'greater good' of its citizens.

The paper articulates that heritage laws, whether national or international, are drafted by heritage bureaucrats and are interpreted in a way that represents professional interests. A common theme seen throughout the case studies in this volume is that the interests of the public, Indigenous groups and special interest groups are not at the forefront of consideration during the drafting of policies or when the impacts or accessibility to heritage are considered.

Beaulieu in her case study of metal detection and policy in two cities in Ontario, Canada, explains the authority of the municipalities, the provincial government agency (the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport) and archaeologists, when it comes to the creation, implementation and maintenance of by-laws and heritage law. She provides details of two very specific by-law policies by giving consideration to public engagement and the perception of authority in these two contexts. She questions how archaeologists can maintain their roles as guardians of the past while maintaining their authoritative role as public representatives. By using these examples, Beaulieu attempts to showcase the complex and difficult position that stakeholders have while working with powerful entities like archaeological societies, government agencies and municipalities.

Ferris and Dent delve into a very complex issue in Ontario, Canada, specifically Archaeological Resource Management (ARM) and Indigenous and Settler Societies. They offer a broad context from which the reader can consider multiple ontologies and the conceptual transformation of archaeology. By discussing anxieties within the profession of ARM, Ferris and Dent review many of the concerns and difficulties within this expanding industry in Canada. By discussing both ARM and Indigenous relationships, this paper highlights many of the anxieties archaeologists encounter as they work with Indigenous partners in what Ferris and Dent refer to as 'state-

regulated resource management regimes' (see Ferris and Dent in this volume).

Trelka explains and challenges the theme of authority of heritage professionals in two different realms, intellectual and legal using World Heritage Convention as an example. Firstly, she reviews the representation of Indigenous peoples in the World Heritage discourse and their struggle to be represented in this intergovernmental programme. She connects persuasiveness of Indigenous peoples to be consulted in the heritage process with human rights issues. Secondly, by employing a case study from a World Heritage Site in the UK she addresses power dynamic when it comes to the intellectual authority of heritage professionals over self-defined original communities who reside within the site. Thirdly, she challenges the idea of archaeologists who work within the frameworks of heritage bureaucracy on the implementation of the Convention at the national level and addresses their vulnerability to politicisation of the process driven by powerful economic forces.

Through different case studies, this volume discusses when the power of heritage workers is real and when it is, at best, imagined. This also applies to the nature of different communities in the heritage process. The contributors show that there is no one answer to the issue of authority, and in some circumstances, heritage workers have legal authority, especially when it comes to the drafting of heritage legislations and policies and their consequent interpretation and implementation. Montgomery Ramírez, for example, calls those who engaged in heritage interpretation who represent heritage agencies as 'powerful weavers,' but they are not the only one who engage in this activity as 'weavers of heritage are numerous with their own design in mind' (see Montgomery Ramírez, in this volume). The challenges and nuances of engaging with heritage are explored through the case study of the Archaeological Open-Air Museums (AOAMs) and how those sites can serve as places for emotional and human-focused storytelling and engagement. He explains that AOAMs can provide a platform for decolonised interpretations when contrasted with those created within the conceptual confines of colonial thinking.

Sinamai contrasts Western knowledge systems and traditional African ways of knowing. His paper reflects on these traditional experiences and knowledge and how they are perceived by Western academia. His discussion on the *authoritative* West and its restrictive approach to traditional ways of knowing find parallels with North American Indigenous researchers and histories. The direct evidenced link between the past societies can be also observed in a European context (Trelka 2019). The case study presented by Trelka is contextualised in an important conversation on the value and authority of Indigenous and/or traditional ways of knowing and self-defined 'original' communities.

Different ways of knowing of course do not occur exclusively in the context of Indigenous peoples, traditional communities and minority groups. They occur in different contemporary political and socioeconomic contexts and influence how we deal with the legacy of settler colonialism, in postcolonial approaches and class inequalities within capitalist society.

The theme of authority has been revisited in heritage studies literature and heritage policies for at least three decades. For example, in Africa the theme had been scrutinised by African scholars during ICOMOS General Assembly in Zimbabwe in 2003 (ICOMOS 2003). It seems that there has been very little progress on the meaningful inclusion of descendant communities and Indigenous peoples in how heritage is envisioned and practiced. This is because there are major ontological challenges to overcome that prevent the current system from responding to the need to represent diffrent ways of knowing. This volume has critically assessed power struggles for authority and representation within diffrent cultural contexts.

Acknowledgements

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