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Willem J. H. Willems

Abstract

Relations between European archaeologies and those elsewhere in the world are manifold and complex. They involve issues in archaeological research, in dealing with archaeological heritage resources, and in the archaeological profession, that are also influenced by the dominant use of English. This paper explores some of those issues that were also presented at a debate during the World Archaeological Congress in Dublin.

Keywords

Europe; archaeological heritage resources; language; indigenous issues; stakeholders; pseudoarchaeology; world heritage.

The development of contemporary archaeology is essentially a European phenomenon, even though the concept of archaeology is probably older than the concept of Europe. Professor Alain Schnapp (1993), in his masterful exploration of the history of archaeology, has shown that its roots date as far back as the ancient Assyrians themselves. Although archaeology is not, therefore, an invention of the Renaissance as is often stated, it can nevertheless be said that it was at least reinvented then. Modern archaeology began in the Europe of the antiquarians of the fifteenth century, and even though 'Europe' itself is not a self-evident entity but more of a 'concept', a matter of geographical definition, it seems to me that there is indeed something like a 'European archaeology'.

A European archaeology certainly is a reality according to most of the authors involved in a recent discussion on 'Does the archaeology of Europe exist?' in the journal *Archaeological Dialogues*. If one defines it with Ascherson loosely as 'the way in which archaeology is done in Europe' (2008: 28), there are some interesting issues that can be examined in relation to other archaeologies around the world, which in many cases are the direct offspring of European colonial archaeology. Before delving somewhat deeper into this issue, it may be useful to remind ourselves first that Europe is not the same as the European Union. The EU is a supranational organization of twenty-seven countries, a political and legal entity that has had various powers voluntarily conferred on it by its

member states, but that does not equal Europe in a geographical sense. Neither does the Council of Europe which includes among its forty-six members countries like Russia and Turkey that stretch beyond Europe. Even for countries that seem to unquestionably belong to Europe, there can be fuzziness. I have often heard English colleagues, for example, remark that they would be 'in Europe' for the summer, meaning the continental part. At the very least, this indicates a mental attitude of being from a separate area.

There is more to this than there might seem, because in fact there is certainly not just one European archaeology either. Ever since the late 1970s, there has been a difference between mainstream central European archaeology – what Ascherson chooses to term the 'Kossina province' – and Anglo-American archaeology, with a Dutch-Scandinavian zone in between that has characteristics of both. In addition, there is the difference between 'western' and 'eastern' archaeology that the creation of the EAA, the European Association of Archaeologists, in the early 1990s was intended to bridge (Biehl et al. 2002; Härke 2000). There are fundamental differences between these archaeologies, not only in theoretical outlook but also in methodology and down to such fundamentals as excavation methods. The reasons for this are obviously related to separate development, to the political history of Europe, and last but not least to language and communication barriers that have recently received quite a bit of attention.¹ Much of this is being addressed by Anthony Harding, so I will not pursue this further – or, at least, not in the same direction because, despite differences, European archaeologies also have similarities and a common history that is relevant for discussion of the relation to archaeologies elsewhere.

In the previous century, and especially in the last three decades, archaeology and its position in society have changed drastically. A modern definition of archaeological, or more broadly of cultural resources, proposed by Bill Lipe (1974) is: 'All cultural materials, including cultural landscapes, that have survived from the past, are potentially cultural resources – that is, have some potential value or use in the present or future.' The idea of seeing the material remains of the past as a resource (for society as a whole as well as for research by archaeologists) became widespread in the last quarter century, especially in the English-speaking part of the world (Watkins and Beaver 2008). Although there are similar, relatively neutral terms in other languages – such as the Italian term *beni culturali* – these are not necessarily attached to the same idea. It is seen as an effective way to put archaeological remains as cultural resources on the same level as other scarce – and in this case also fragile and non-renewable – resources in the modern world. In itself it is also a more value-free concept than 'heritage', although admittedly it has economical connotations and it has been argued that such a view creates a utilitarian view of the past and is linked to a positivist theoretical framework.

The use of archaeological heritage for nationalistic, ideological and indeed other purposes has become a frequent subject of study, originally due to its clear abuse in many cases that are now well documented. Of course there is a difference between the uses of the past in, say, early nineteenth-century Denmark, in the newly founded Greek state in the same period or in the ongoing formation process of the EU and, on the other hand, for example, the role of archaeology under the Third Reich. However, while studying the past need not in itself necessarily be politically motivated, dealing with remains of the past and developing means to take care of them is always a political activity and in most countries

the beginnings of this activity are intimately connected with politics and nationalism. In fact, even the word ‘heritage’ carries the meaning of ‘that which is inherited’ and is thus intimately connected to the political and cultural history of groups or nations and this is true for many languages, for example the French concept of *patrimoine*, the German *Kulturerbe* or Dutch *erfgoed*. In fact, both the Latin terms *patrimonium* and *monumentum* refer to *moneo*, ‘to cause to think’, and this is also found in Germanic languages, for example Scandinavian (*forminnen*) or German (*Denkmal*).

The interest in heritage resources in Europe is now some two centuries old. Though there are a few earlier beginnings, it is a direct consequence of the political restructuring of post-Napoleonic Europe, the formation of nation-states and the need to develop, or – in the case of long-established countries such as France, Spain, Portugal and Britain – to (re)define a ‘national identity’. The past is an essential component in that process and it is significant that the concept of ‘national antiquities’ was invented in this period. The term *antiquités nationales* was used in the title of a collection of five volumes, published in 1790 by the French antiquarian A-L. Millin, and was soon after applied widely all over early nineteenth-century Europe. It was around the same time, at the end of the European Enlightenment age, that archaeology first developed as an academic discipline and that antiquarian societies began to function. Most of these were founded in the first half of the nineteenth century for the purpose of preservation of archaeological and other cultural resources and the prevention of their destruction, as well as the investigation of sites and the founding of museums with educational purposes.

At the same time, heritage resources became important as part of a colonial project that sought to explain and justify European dominance in terms of a Social Darwinian logic, with colonized peoples at lower stages and European civilization at the top (Fienig et al. 2008). Although the local context and significance were probably of little interest,² there were quite important efforts to inventory, select, interpret and preserve indigenous heritage resources in European colonies. In many cases, these were introduced significantly earlier than in the homeland, aided – no doubt – by the fact that such new initiatives were more easily realized in a colonial context than in Europe. Examples are the ‘Archaeological survey of India’ (from 1861), ‘Committee for archaeological investigation in the Dutch Indies’ (from 1901), the ‘Bushmen Relics Act’ (1911) or the regulations established in French North Africa in the 1920s and 1930s (Schlanger 2008). There can be little doubt that these early measures have been quite influential in preserving archaeological remains as well as in shaping archaeologies all over the world, and various histories of these archaeologies illustrate that fact.

It does not come as a big surprise, therefore, that most of the archaeologies around the world are not all that dissimilar to continental European archaeology and that most have always worked mainly under so-called ‘traditional’ cultural-historical or historical-anthropological paradigms. In my opinion, this is true for all of Asia, including vast groups such as Indian, Chinese and Japanese archaeology, African and Arab archaeologies, as well as South and Central America. All of these have sometimes very distinct differences and particular characteristics, of course, and they do have alternative paradigms, but the mainstream approaches are similar, as Ucko (1995) also found. They are changing slowly, in some areas under the influence of now dominant capitalist principles and the introduction of commercial archaeology in heritage management, and

everywhere under the growing influence of English as a second language of native archaeologists and the language of international academic discourse. This mechanism introduces theories and approaches from the Anglo-American sphere that, even though numerically a minority on the world stage, sets the tone and, when regarded from a regional perspective, appears to be leading globally, a fact that is enhanced further by the dominance of English-language publishers and by the fact that English is also the dominating language of international discussion in governmental as well as nongovernmental organizations and of international treaties and charters. A striking example is the use of the concept of 'rescue archaeology' in the Valletta Convention of the Council of Europe (1992), which is totally wrong and in fact in contradiction with the purpose of the convention. Nevertheless, it is used everywhere instead of the perfectly correct 'preventive archaeology' derived from the French text (Willems 2007).

It is interesting to note that this dominant position involves precisely those countries that have *not* been decolonized, because the indigenous populations have largely been wiped out and so many European settlers (and, in some instances, African slaves) arrived that they became dominant. Obviously they have not returned sovereignty to the original inhabitants. In fact, it might be said that the same Social Darwinian viewpoint that led to early forms of heritage management in colonial contexts also provided the logic that was used to justify sovereign title for the superior society. An illuminating account of how this process developed, whereby the British Crown assigned supreme legal authority to itself, is provided by Ferris (2003) in his discussion of the legal background to indigenous challenges of archaeologists' claims to exclusive stewardship of archaeological resources. Although there are still unresolved matters surrounding this issue, several decades of discussion on legal, moral and ethical principles have by now established that indigenous or descendant populations have distinct rights and must not be excluded from their ancestors' past. In some countries, notably the US, this was done through much litigation and bitter dispute. Elsewhere, such as in New Zealand and also Australia, though at times events were quite tempestuous there as well, there appear to have been somewhat different processes of reaching social consensus and at the same time establishing a more inclusive and socially relevant archaeology that produced such admirable products as the Burra Charter (Truscott and Young 2000). Of course these issues are also relevant elsewhere. For example in many South American countries but also elsewhere in the world, there are still many native groups that are excluded from access to their heritage. The colonizer may have left, and native symbols and monuments may actually have become national icons and often cash cows, but there is much social injustice and unequal rights to resources including heritage (for example, Silverman 2008; Ucko 1995).

For Europe however, this state of affairs is fundamentally different. As Pat Wallace, the director of the Irish National Museum, remarked during his address to the World Archaeological Congress in Dublin in 2008, 'we are all indigenes of our countries'. And indeed, broadly speaking and despite the existence of some 'native' groups such as the Saami in Northern Europe and the existence of numerous regional identities ('Welsh', 'Flemish', 'Basque', etc.), European countries are populated by their indigenous peoples and there is no such thing as an indigenous issue in archaeology. In fact, the opposite may be the case. Europe today is confronted with substantial immigration, mostly from Africa and the Arab world, and issues around the relations of immigrants to heritage are starting

to evolve. Here too there are asymmetrical power relations, but it is the natives that are dominant and are in the twenty-first century becoming increasingly intolerant towards the heritage of immigrant groups. Though this involves mostly their intangible heritage (or at least the contemporary culture that these groups consider to be their heritage) and time has been too short for the formation of much archaeological heritage yet, archaeology does have an important role to play here. Our discipline is uniquely positioned to demonstrate, for example, that many assumptions about nations and peoples are unfounded, and it can demonstrate that Europe too has always been much more of a melting pot than is often realized by single-issue populists.

There are still other aspects of the indigenous issue in Anglo-American archaeology that I would like to mention here. First, there may be no such thing as indigenous issues in the archaeology of Europe, but the recognition of indigenous rights to heritage elsewhere have in my opinion been very influential in Europe too, through the translation of 'indigenous' as 'local'. The awareness of and sensitivity to the interests and concerns of local populations has changed drastically over the last two decades. In the same way as indigenous tribesmen were excluded from the archaeological resources investigated by European archaeologists in third world countries, so were, for example, local farmers ignored by their colleagues excavating in the homeland. It is quite probable that the conscious involvement of local stakeholders in modern heritage resource management, and also the development of forms of community archaeology, is to a large extent the result of a change induced by the regard and respect for other people's stakes in heritage resources. This is part of what Barbara Miller has called critical heritage management, 'an approach that seeks to reveal power relations and interests and expose possible social injustices or inappropriate interventions' (2009: 7). And it is surely no coincidence that globally this started in countries with systems of Anglo-Saxon common law, where society is self-regulating, as opposed to the Roman law tradition where much depends on the State, which regulates society. The latter system is more likely to adhere longer to exclusive stewardship of heritage resources by formal representatives of the state and asymmetrical power relations. Through adoption of the Napoleonic 'civil code', Roman law has become dominant in many European countries and by extension to many of their former colonies as well.

A second aspect I consider far less beneficial is the fact that respecting indigenous rights or those of local stakeholders has – especially in Anglo-American countries but not only there – also led to a disconcertingly tolerant attitude towards claims to archaeological heritage resources by all sorts of cranks, religious sects or political fundamentalists and other such folk. It is one thing to respect the values and beliefs of other, mostly dominated, populations or ethnic groups, even if that respect conflicts with the pursuit of knowledge or scientific ideas about the most suitable way to preserve or use the resource. It is in my opinion equally acceptable to respect local stakeholders and to accept that citizens may possibly take decisions about their community's heritage that may not be beneficial to it. In that sense, I would be in favor of Holtorf's (2007) 'democratic model' of the relations between archaeology and society. But there is a limit to this, and it is quite another step to allow people from one's own culture, that after all has passed through the Enlightenment and is based on its principles of rational thought, not just to ignore those very principles (which after all remain a personal decision) but to claim a stake on that basis. When

government agencies or other official organizations equate the claims of self-created pagans and bogus natives to genuine and legitimate indigenous concerns, this is not just a perversion of indigenous rights that should be condemned for that reason alone. It also increases the basis for even more pseudoarchaeology than is already present in Western society dominated by mass media. There is indeed a need for a more self-reflective, accountable and transparent management of archaeological heritage resources as Blain and Wallis (2006) advocate, and so-called ‘pagans’ can sometimes be harmless or even useful allies, but there is a difference between a ‘democratic’ model and what I would term an ‘ultraliberal’ one and the potential damage of pseudoarchaeology to the archaeological heritage is also far too big to be ignored (Fagan 2006). As Renfrew put it in his foreword to Fagan’s book, ‘archaeology invites us to look seriously again at our own values; pseudoarchaeology subverts and distorts any such aspiration’.

Although the above illustrates that relations between European archaeology and other archaeologies in the world are multifaceted and complex, and also that archaeology inside Europe is by no means uniform, there are more straightforward issues in the relationship as well. One important issue that should be mentioned in this context is that of the World Heritage List.

The World Heritage List is based on the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention that is one of UNESCO’s most successful conventions, having been ratified by no less than 186 states parties, as they are called in UNESCO-speak. The list currently has 890 properties – another typical UNESCO word – inscribed on it, of which 689 are cultural, 176 natural and twenty-five mixed properties (see Fig. 1). Most of the list consists of cultural heritage, which refers to heritage resources of three types: monuments, groups of buildings and sites, to which cultural landscapes can in fact be added. These are considered to be part of the cultural heritage of the world, designated as such by the World Heritage

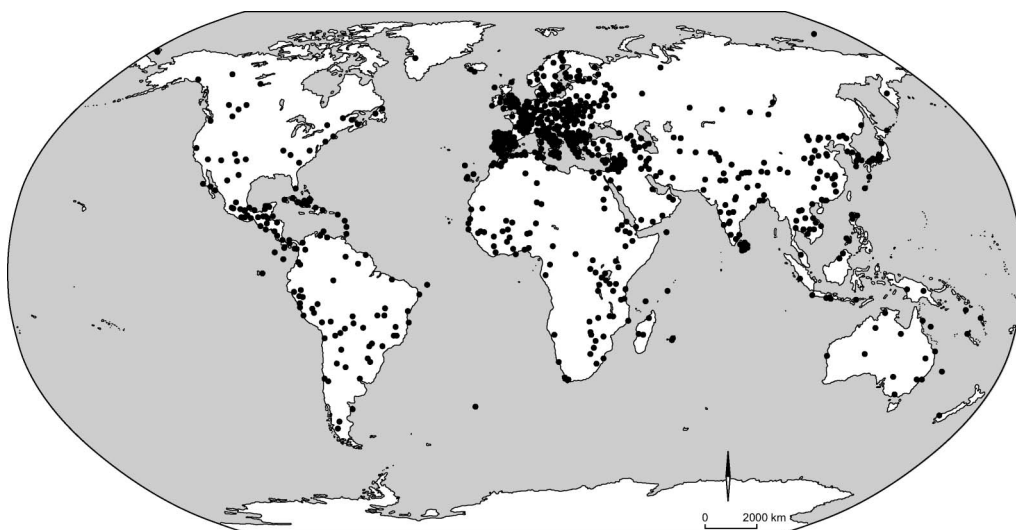


Figure 1 Overview of World Heritage ‘properties’ as derived from the World Heritage Centre publications, adapted by Medy Oberendorff.

Committee because they are considered to have 'outstanding universal value', a central concept from the convention. This concept is obviously too general for practical application. As a result, the World Heritage Committee has defined ten specific criteria against which nominated properties should be compared. These criteria, six of which concern cultural criteria, have been specified in the so-called 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention'. These guidelines are not a static text, but they are continually evolved to accommodate new insights or policies and subsequent decisions. The first version of the operational guidelines was adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 1977. Since then they have been adjusted and expanded to reflect the subsequent decisions of the committee, the latest dating from 2008.

In the operational guidelines and various publications (for example, ICOMOS 2005; Labadi 2005, 2007; Van der Aa 2005), it is clear that there is much concern about the balance of the World Heritage list, because until recently the inscription process was dominated by European proposals. A simple overview of all inscribed properties (Fig. 1) shows that there is a distinct imbalance with a strong domination of European properties. There are various reasons for this state of affairs that vary from the demands of the nomination process that can be met only with great difficulty by developing countries to inherent biases towards monumental built heritage. One of the current programmes to remedy the present situation of a Eurocentric World Heritage List is to introduce other types of heritage, by recognizing cultural achievement as expressed in landscape (Fowler 2007) or in industrial and technological monuments. In fact, it seems to me that archaeological heritage can contribute much to help out here as well. Many archaeological sites of great importance from a global perspective are located outside Europe and have so far not been proposed for the list because they lack monumentality and do not have much of what is sometimes referred to as the 'wow' factor, great visual impact, or because the state in which they are located lacks the means or sufficient knowledge to complete the nomination process successfully.

Although the idea behind all this is sympathetic, the question remains as to whether making the World Heritage List more representative will not in the end undermine its fundamental premises of outstanding universal value. Nevertheless, if European and other archaeologies of the world could find ways to cooperate in promoting more archaeological sites as world heritage, that would at least enhance the limited number of non-monumental, archaeological 'properties' on the list, and often combinations with natural heritage are an option. At a recent meeting of ICAHM, which is the ICOMOS Committee for Archaeological Heritage Management, it was proposed to make this task one of the goals of the committee.

Given the still too Eurocentric nature of the World Heritage List there is certainly no need for a European Heritage List, though notions of a common European heritage do exist. However, as mentioned by Harding (this issue), there are a number of European treaties – created not by the European Union but by the Council of Europe so they must be ratified by a country for its provisions to be binding – that have set important standards. For archaeology, the Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Council of Europe 1992) is of central importance. It is a comprehensive answer to the challenges of modern-day development and a model that can be of use elsewhere. Even though today there is increased emphasis on wider frameworks and integration of all

aspects of cultural heritage, it is here that the archaeological heritage is described and basic principles established for states on how to deal properly with that heritage. The European experience encapsulated in this and later CoE conventions may certainly provide important guidance globally. Nevertheless, as always when Western ideas are being exported, there is need for caution here.

A good example is the principle of preservation *in situ* that is now more or less enshrined in Europe, though the way in which it takes shape varies due to legal and political differences. As a result, there tend to be policies whereby sites, or better the broader contexts of 'historic landscapes', are being managed in ways that are 'sustainable'. Heritage values must be understood and articulated, and strategies developed on how they can be sustained. Preservation 'by record', as a result of development projects or through investigation for purely academic reasons, is generally suspect and seen by government heritage managers as a euphemism for destruction. Of course neither rescue or preventive archaeology (Willems 2007: 64) nor research archaeology preserves anything material, though they do preserve data and produce knowledge to advance the discipline. In Europe itself, increased control over archaeological research and the holy grail of *in situ* preservation often has the effect of depriving vocational archaeologists of their hobby, sometimes of denying the local population the right to deal with their heritage as they see fit and occasionally of driving academics to countries where research is less restricted, which, of course, is often outside Europe. It may well be that needs outside Europe are different, and the exploitation of the resource to generate income and sustain the population can and should take precedence over maintaining principles: preferably within limits, of course, and with a critical approach to avoid new dangers (Lafrenz Samuels 2008). But enhancing the economic value of archaeological heritage by making it visible or enhancing its material shape or discovering its significance by destructive research can be a compelling need superseding preservation concerns. A similar ethical problem may occur with valuable cultural landscapes in economically under-resourced countries (cf. Fowler 2007), where maintaining the most significant values can be difficult to reconcile with development, improving the quality of life or the alleviation of poverty.

A possible solution to these problems could be found in well-thought-through and creative management plans, tailored to local needs. This may be an area where 'the way in which archaeology is done in Europe' or broader 'Western' experiences can be valuable elsewhere, and certainly this is an area where common ground can be created and global cooperation established. In that sense, the increasingly integrated archaeological practice that Harding predicts for Europe may have its parallel on a global scale through the three organizations that work in different niches of world archaeology. The oldest, dating back to the nineteenth century, is the International Union for Pre- and Protohistoric Sciences (IUPPS) that concentrates on research. Second is ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites founded in 1965 as a result of the Venice Charter, that through its committees for archaeological heritage management, for underwater archaeology and some other forms of archaeology is primarily concerned with heritage issues. And finally there is WAC, the World Archaeological Congress founded in 1986, which is the most inclusive but has its focus mostly on the social role of archaeology. Our discipline will greatly benefit from their increased co-operation.

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Notes

- 1 See not only the discussions in *Archaeological Dialogues*, but also recently in the Forum section of *Archaeologies*, April 2008, 4(1): 164–200, and in the special issue on ‘Communication in Archaeology’ of the *European Journal of Archaeology*, August/December 2007, 10(2–3).
- 2 It may have been of limited interest to the political forces that provided the impetus, but that does not imply that the same was true for the early archaeologists and other researchers involved.

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