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Publish or perish? presenting the work of junior archaeologists to a broader audience

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INTER-SECTION

Innovative approaches by Junior Archaeological Researchers

I



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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

‘PUBLISH OR PERISH’? PRESENTING THE WORK OF JUNIOR ARCHAEOLOGISTS TO A BROADER AUDIENCE

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Mette B. Langbroek³, Roosmarie J.C. Vlaskamp⁴*

We are very proud to present the first volume of INTER-SECTION: Innovative Approaches by Junior Archaeological Researchers! This journal emanates from the observation that student research which is carried out conform high theoretical and methodological standards is generally only read by a handful of people, as it is solely reported in theses and other written assignments. Often, however, such work would be a valuable contribution to the archaeological discourse and could provide ‘fresh’, innovative views on Archaeology as a discipline. Our aim is to make student research, carried out at the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, available to a broader public by stimulating these junior archaeologists to write a short, focused article, counselled by a faculty teacher. Reviewing of these articles by renowned external specialists further aids in the amendment of these papers and provides an invaluable experience for a future academic career. INTER-SECTION is a platform where gathered knowledge of the past and innovative ambitions for the future meet, and are united to produce articles that appeal to a broad audience of archaeologists.

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Background

In September 2014 Leiden University’s Faculty of Archaeology celebrated the opening of the renovated *van Steenis* building with the two-day symposium: ‘Archaeology in Transition’. Here, faculty staff members, students, and external invitees congregated to discuss the nature and future of Archaeology. At a given moment, one of the invited scholars raised the point that, unfortunately, only very few students aim to publish research they carried out during their studies. In discussing the potential reasons for this, students proclaimed insecurity on the relevance of their work to a broader archaeological field, as well as mere inexperience and unfamiliarity with the process of publication to be the source of their hesitation. While studying essentially should be aimed at

exploring and developing yourself, your interests, capabilities and, especially, getting grip on the driving forces that made you decide to study Archaeology, the current academic climate increasingly expects students to do more than the study program principally demands, an actuality that often only reveals itself after graduation. Fortunately, the study program offers many possibilities to do so. The faculty’s wide range of specializations provide both theoretical and thematic courses that are often well attended by students who do not take these subjects as a main specialization, thereby broadening their archaeological scope and knowledge. Furthermore, the individual research projects of faculty staff members with a field-work component, provide ample opportunities to acquire additional experience during a student’s degrees.

Apart from the extracurricular activities commonly accommodated by educational institutions, academic employees increasingly expect junior archaeologists to have excelled even further. When applying for academic grants or vacancies, a candidate's capability to set up and carry out research that is methodologically solid, innovative, and societally relevant are considered among the main criteria. The ability to do so is often tested by the amount of presented posters or papers at international conferences and publications during their studies, whilst this is generally not part of the regular curriculum. It seems that the phrase 'publish or perish', heretofore used to stress the competitive academic environment established researchers find themselves in, nowadays becomes increasingly applicable to junior archaeologists who are just venturing into the arena.

In the light of these developments, we, a group of four (former) Research Master students, have worked out the idea to create a journal that functions as an accessible and stimulating platform, and facilitates students' first steps on the academic ladder. Publications in such a journal would not only benefit the author's curriculum vitae, but would additionally allow the extensive amount of data annually being produced and analysed by Leiden's students to be accessed by the broader archaeological community. Initial pitching of this idea at both students and teachers revealed that a faculty journal for the publication of junior research is indeed much desired. The end-product of almost a year's work of discussing, creating, calling for papers, writing, reviewing, adapting, and editing lies before you. The journal is named "*INTER-SECTION*", symbolizing the wide range of archaeological discourses being studied and taught at Leiden's Faculty of Archaeology.

Aims

Archaeology is an intrinsically multi-disciplinary conduct, investigating the materialization of human activities in distinct geographic regions and varying time periods by the application of a wide range of methodologies. Because a single archaeologist is never specialized in all of these, and research groups are strongly rooted in traditional approaches, looking beyond the imaginary borders of sub-disciplines may fuel innovative approaches and lead to surprising insights. As much as the application of multiple approaches is argued typical for archaeological research, multi-disciplinarity does not necessarily imply inter-disciplinarity. Because geographic regions and time periods, and their adjacent methodological and theoretic approaches can strongly vary, understanding of past human activities can only be reached in its full extent through continuous interaction between sub-disciplines. The broad and diverse scientific staff of Leiden's faculty, and its educational *World Archaeology* programme being structured around broader research themes, creates great potential for doing so. Instead of focusing on a particular method, region, or time-periods, at *INTER-SECTION* we therefore aim to consciously bring together the approaches of individual students in order to stimulate broader theoretical and methodological discussions, and present

the sub-disciplines of archaeology with alternative approaches.

We do realize that writing an article is a completely different exercise than the common written assignments students are familiar with such as essays, internship reports, or dissertations, and as such demands a style of writing which generally remains unpractised by the average student. In order to ensure that students are well guided in the writing process we rely on the invaluable experience of the faculty's teaching staff. Each author is supported by a 'referee', often the teaching supervisor of the course or thesis an article is based on, who aids by proofreading the initial drafts and discussing how these can be improved. The peer-review process is set up in such a way that external specialists in the field of research provide additional suggestions for improvement. Following the criteria for publication, authors are stimulated to evaluate the impact of their own results on a broader scale, which causes their articles to provide an interesting, interactive, and important read for their archaeological peers. We truly hope that the joint effort of students, teachers, alumni and external researchers in the creation of *INTER-SECTION*, leads to an increase of the publication of student research in the future.

Practical Details

INTER-SECTION: Innovative Approaches by Junior Archaeological Researchers is an open-access journal. It is published twice a year, digitally available online (<http://www.inter-section.nl>), and printed in limited numbers. For each of the forthcoming volumes we plan to publish between 5 and 7 articles. To further stimulate the publicity of research conducted by archaeology students, each volume will contain an overview of all undergraduate and graduate thesis titles that have been approved since the previous volume. We gladly invite everyone to distribute *INTER-SECTION* publications amongst their personal network and welcome students to send in proposals, for which the details can be found on our website.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost we would like to thank the members of the Faculty Board for their critiques and support, without which the realization of this initiative would not have been possible. We are also very grateful to the professors and associate professors who have been willing to become members of our Editorial Advisory Committee. Your experience, enthusiasm, advice, and the practical help in finding adequate peer-reviewers, have been invaluable in the setting up of this journal. Additional thanks are addressed to the teaching referees, and the anonymous reviewers, who were so kind to take the time to provide the authors with constructive remarks and suggestions for further improvements of their articles, contributing to the academic quality we pursue. Last, but definitely not least, we are very grateful for the enthusiasm of the contributing authors, Samuel Cardénas Meijers, Fenno Noij and Amy Quinn, who worked very hard to realize the first volume of *INTER-SECTION: Innovative Approaches by Junior Archaeological Researchers*.