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SITTING ON THE FENCE: NEGOTIATING ARCHAEOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Festschrift for Prof. Dr Raymond H.A. Corbey
in celebration of his 70th birthday



54

ANALECTA
PRAEHISTORICA
LEIDENSIA

edited by
S.T. HUSSAIN AND G.L. DUSSELDORP



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ANALECTA
PRAEHISTORICA
LEIDENSIA 54

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Raymond Corbey: A philosophical thorn in the side of archaeologists and much more

Gerrit L. Dusseldorp, Shumon T. Hussain

CAPTURING THE FENCE-SITTER

Who knew that “Sitting on the fence” could lead to such a versatile and inspiring academic biography? Raymond Corbey has moved across so many different areas of research that few of his colleagues realise the enormous scope and productivity of this epistemologist’s life. A retrospective and a celebration are thus, we think, in order.

Raymond’s academic career can be characterised via three main spatiotemporal nodes: Nijmegen, Tilburg, and Leiden. His disciplinary trajectory spans a wide array of fields with main foci on anthropology, archaeology, and philosophy. A single description can hardly do justice to Raymond’s scientific history and hence this volume takes a multi-angled and deliberately multi-vocal approach to the complicated task. A notable historical perspective and personal contextualisation is offered by Roebroeks (this volume), while a conceptual sketch of Raymond’s idiosyncratic scientific style is provided by Hussain (this volume). But can these descriptions really capture the man, the style, and the science? Here we propose a more intuitive and fairly pragmatic approach to the jubilarian consisting of some personal recollections, a few selected photographic illustrations, and a more artistic rendering of Corbey provided by Dersjant (see below). The rest of this celebratory *Festschrift* serves as a mosaic of diverse forms of engagement with Raymond’s wide-ranging scientific interest and influence collated by some of his close colleagues, companions (including nonhuman companion species in the sense of Donna Haraway), and intellectual followers.

THE LIMINAL ARCHAEOLOGIST

With his academic arrival in archaeology, Raymond literally managed to turn his hobby into his profession! Still, as a philosopher-anthropologist, he remained a liminal figure in the Dutch archaeological world (his arrival also, funnily, coincided with the increasing “hipness” of the concept of liminality in archaeology, so in a way his liminality embodies an important theoretical performance, perhaps even *performance art*).

This had some amusing reverberations (at least we students at the time thought so): When Raymond was first appointed professor at the Faculty of Archaeology in Leiden, the magazine for the archaeology profession in the Netherlands, *Archeobrief*, duly took notice and reported his arrival (Anonymous 2005). The editor even added a portrait picture, and laughter rang the halls of the faculty, as the printed image was of a completely different person! This aptly illustrates how Raymond has been an integral figure of the Faculty of Archaeology, yet flew under the radar in archaeology at large.

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Figure 1. Raymond with René Descartes, Oegstgeest, The Netherlands, June 2018. Photograph: Dmitri De Loecker.

NOT SO LIMINAL NOW!

To archaeology students from the late 1990s onwards, Raymond is far from a liminal figure, however. PhD students and those enrolled in the Master's program were exposed to and influenced by the in-house philosopher as he taught the formative archaeological theory courses. But especially his long-running epistemology course, mandatory for RMA and PhD students, made waves. It inspired many of us to take new avenues of research (see for example Mol, this volume) but the relentless questioning of supposed certainties and the at first sight haphazard organisation of topics was also disliked by some. Even though some alumni would never again adopt the "view from the fence", they could not escape the faculty without at least indulging it briefly.

Although always friendly and approachable, Raymond is unfazed by occasionally awkward

situations. Regardless of seniority, he will voice brusque interjections during lectures to "speak louder!" as well as raise incisive questions and sometimes adamant objections. This is always done with a good dose of often implicit humour though. At the defence of Dusseldorp's MA-thesis his opening remark was to encourage him to take a sip of water followed by the words "You'll need it when I ask my first question". The question that followed was probably tricky to answer but by now long-forgotten – not Raymond's prefacing of it though.

CAPTURING THE EMBEDDED PHILOSOPHER

Still, although pulling the rug from under students' feet to force them to examine treasured assumptions and *idees reçues* was important to at least some of us, Raymond had far more on his mind. He has always been highly productive in terms of academic

papers, books, and reviews reflecting his wide range of interests – despite or perhaps precisely because of his apparent liminal positionality within the field. More importantly, titles such as *Vuistbijlen en Cadillacs – Reflecties over het verzamelen* (“Handaxes and Cadillacs, reflections on collecting”) and *The Acheulean handaxe: More like a bird’s song than a Beatles’ tune?* not only reference the one topic that keeps returning to the forefront in his career, they also illustrate his highly original and often provocative style of reasoning and argumentation, which will continue to shape the tone and academic legacy of the Faculty of Archaeology.

To capture this quirky originality, one of the *Festschrift* contributors decided to adopt a similarly original approach, creatively mapping the contours of Raymond’s scholarly persona:

Raymond

*always
wondering about
wandering on
all ways
ways*

*always
dialogue
internal
external
cutting sharply*

*always
im Grund
εις Δυνατότητα
in efficacia
dans l’histoire*

*always
primum non nocere*

Corbey¹

- Paul J. Dersjant (Leiden, December 2022)



Figure 2. The bird-friend: Raymond and Marina Elliott at the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary during a visit to Vancouver, Canada in 2006. Photograph: Mark Collard.

RAYMOND – A HOMMAGE

The following pages are a *hommage* to an important, widely cherished, and always approachable and kind colleague, supervisor, and academic. They can never hope to capture the breadth and richness of the jubilant personality and academic endeavour, as a *Festschrift* is always, before anything else, a community artefact and not a mirror of life, intention, or personal priorities. It largely reflects the attitudes, agendas, and beliefs of those contributing to and assembling the *Festschrift* more so than the purport of its receiver. What we, humble workers being observed from atop the fence, do with the wisdom imparted to us may amuse or even annoy the fence-sitter and involuntary subject of this volume. Yet, to complement the diverse contributions, considerations, contextualisations, interpretations, and reflections that follow, an overview of Raymond’s published work, as complete as possible, is offered below, a body of work that stands as a reflection of his many intellectual wanderings (see Geurds, this volume) and lasting academic achievements.

The passing of time that archaeologists are so obsessed with ultimately affects all human endeavour and also this volume. One of the planned contributions has unfortunately not materialised due

1 The text is written as a sediment of conversations with Raymond during our many walks in and around Leiden, and not least on terraces of the cafés along the way.

to unforeseen circumstances,² and other intended reflections had to be abandoned or redirected because of the complexities and mangle of practice that is everyday life. We hope that the present volume, with all its partiality and historicity, still succeeds in documenting and commenting on the academic life of the jubilarian. Just like archaeology, the *Festschrift* represents merely a fragmentary, imperfect record of Raymond's life and efforts, but this is perhaps precisely its beauty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank all those who shared photographic memories on the jubilarian with us, especially Dimitri De Loecker, Marina Elliott, and Mark Collard.

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2 "Early in the preparation of my contribution to the present *Festschrift*, my physician said that *dr Alzheimer* had come my way. I shall therefore have to restrain from writing a notice, regrettably. My plan was to write on the two adjacent and rather similar LBK early farmers' villages of Janskamperveld and Sittard (at only 3 km one from the other, on the same side of the Geleenbeek in Raymond's home province of Limburg).

For long times Raymond and I have done things together, walked the Leiden vicinity, discussed his and my ideas, certainly not only on academical questions but also on broader topics. Given the verdict, I regret very much to have to abstain from a contribution to this *Festschrift*.

However, I take this opportunity to wish him all the best, now and further on.

Piet"

(Pieter van de Velde 20 December 2022)