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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gatekeepers, Geographies, and Access in the Archaeology of West Asia

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Forty-five years ago, E. W. Said (*Orientalism* [London: Penguin 1995 (1978)]) famously decried disciplines studying the past and present ‘east’. He argued that oriental studies, ranging from those studying Arabic to Archaeology, were involved in a project of control, appropriation, and alienation of the cultural and linguistic heritage of (formerly) dominated countries in Asia. Nearly half a century later it is pertinent to ask the uneasy question whether Said’s critique remains valid today. What is the power relation at present between archaeologists from the rich formerly colonial states (especially Western Europe and the USA), and their colleagues living in West Asia?

Here, I will critically assess the status quo in the archaeology of West Asia, and ask to what degree the field remains dominated by western scholars. After a discussion of the current dynamics of the relationship between foreign and regional participants in the archaeology of West Asia, I will evaluate who holds power in this field of archaeology by assessing: first, the composition of committees of key organizations in the study of the ancient West Asia; second, where major congress meetings take place; third, who organizes these meetings; fourth, who sits on the editorial boards of a number of leading journals; and, fifth, how well accessible key publications of West Asian archaeology are. The results suggests that, after nearly half a century Said’s critique has not lost its sting.

KEYWORDS archaeology, West Asia, post-colonialism, gatekeepers, conferences, editors, open access

Introduction

Archaeologist working in Western Asia have not avoided the issue of the colonial origins of the discipline. It is by now widely acknowledged and uncontroversial that the manner in which early ‘archaeologists’ operated, and the colonial

agenda's they were working to substantiate, are problematic from today's perspective (Bahrani, 1998; Mourad, 2007; Swenson, 2013; Rizvi, 2015; Meskell, 2020; Shortland, 2022). The very fact that the looting of cultural treasures took place far beyond our living memories in the days of the Ottoman Empire, makes denouncing these precursors of archaeology in West Asia both a safe and satisfying pastime. It is satisfying because the less than perfect origins of the study of ancient West Asia can be contrasted with our current more sophisticated methods and approaches, and with more regulated and inclusive fieldwork practices of recent decades. It is also safe, because the focus is firmly on the objectionable *modus operandi* of archaeology in the colonial era and *not* on how archaeology operates at present. Some 'ethnographies' of fieldwork practices have been undertaken, in which things like the exclusion of local knowledge and the invisibility of skilled work of local staff are discussed (van der Linde, 2012; Mickel, 2021), but discussions of power structures among those that practice the archaeology of West Asia are few and far between (e.g. Bernbeck, 2012). Thus a critical assessment of whether we have really shed our problematic roots in the archaeology of West Asia has been avoided by and large. There has been a tendency to focus on ideas that are clearly no longer acceptable, such as racism or colonialism, while avoiding the paramount issue of *control*, that is who is in a position to determine the agenda and the deployment of resources in the discipline of West Asian archaeology.

Shifting panels in West Asia

It has become increasingly apparent that the study of ancient West Asia needs to adapt to a changing world, and over the past years there have been various initiatives that reflect this awareness. The most visible manifestation of this development consists of the rebranding of journals, institutes, and organizations invested in the study of ancient West Asia. The most recent example is the change of the 'Oriental Institute' in Chicago to the 'Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, West Asia & North Africa', which occurred in April 2023, and is part of a much broader development. Thus, the former journal *Biblical Archaeology* became *Near Eastern Archaeology* and the organization publishing the journal changed from the 'American Society of *Oriental* Research' to the 'American Society of *Overseas* Research' (more on this organization below). For many archaeologists affiliated with ASOR, the orientation away from biblical archaeology appears to have been a difficult process (Silberman, 1998). In the British Museum we see a similar shift in terminologies, in which the 'Department of Ancient Near East' first became the 'Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities' and subsequently, the 'Department of the Middle East' (see also Bahrani, 1998; Bernbeck, 2012; and Rattenborg, 2018 on the politics of geographical designations in West Asia). This adoption of less biased terminologies is important, and the use of terms like West Asia instead of the Near East, or BCE instead of BC, is crucial and opens up space for researchers from diverse backgrounds to engage more equally.

One might ask, however, first, why this rebranding has occurred in recent years, after being resisted in some cases for over a century (for example, the Oriental

Institute was founded in 1919), and, second, whether the efforts to decolonize our terminologies represents a genuine change in West Asian archaeology, or could be considered a form of window dressing.

Let us start with the question why these changes in terminologies are occurring now. Of course, the decolonization of archaeology as a whole has gained significant momentum in recent years (Nicholas & Hollowell, 2007; Porter, 2010; Greenberg & Hamilakis, 2022; Harmanşah, 2023), but the extra momentum in rebranding the study of ancient West Asia in recent years is also, I would argue, a response to changes in West Asian countries. In particular, there has been a pronounced shift in how archaeologists from western countries (Europe, the USA, Canada) are perceived within West Asia in recent decades, a development that is probably best understood as a post-colonial reassessment of the role of foreign versus national archaeologists. In consequence, the conditions under which foreign archaeologists can work in West Asia have become more stringent, and in many places the amount of bureaucratic, linguistic, and financial investment that is required to undertake archaeological fieldwork has increased substantially. A related trend has been that archaeological excavation permits, and especially those of large and prestigious projects, have increasingly become used as political leverage in international relations between countries (more on this below). These trends have been most marked in Egypt, Iran, and Türkiye, but they do occur across the region of West Asia in various levels of intensity.

Here, I will use Türkiye as an example of such developments, both because it has been at the forefront of the shifting balance of foreign and national participants in archaeology, and because I am more familiar with developments in this country, having worked there myself for many years. Over the last decades the regulations in Türkiye to do fieldwork that have been imposed include (for excavations): to commit to a ten-year project and provide evidence of adequate funding for that period; the obligation to do four-month seasons; the obligation to execute restoration projects, fence the site, and make it accessible for visitors; the obligation to build a dig house with storage facilities; the obligation to permanently employ a site guard; and the obligation to have a team that is composed of a majority of Turkish staff (Balter, 2009; Hodos, 2015: 96–99; Özdoğan, 2014: 5–6). Not all these measures were upheld strictly for all projects, and some (such as the four-month seasons) seem to have been quietly shelved (although in 2024 this plan for longer excavation seasons with more emphasis on heritage development has been rekindled). Nonetheless, in concert, these regulations have made it nearly impossible for foreign archaeologists to fulfil all the requirements that are necessary to obtain an excavation permit in Türkiye. In addition, there have been a number of incidents where excavations permits of high-profile projects, such as Hattusa and Ephesus, were withheld as leverage in diplomatic conflicts — things over which the teams excavating had no control and had no part in (Güsten, 2011; Letsch & Connolly, 2013; Stokstad, 2016). Finally, there have been controversies surrounding the nationalization of various high-profile archaeological sites, such as Troy, Göbekli Tepe, and Çatalhöyük (Özdoğan, 2014: 5–6; Atakuman, 2021: 253).

As a result of the developments outlined above, there has been a steady decline in the number of foreign archaeological projects in Türkiye (Figure 1), which has

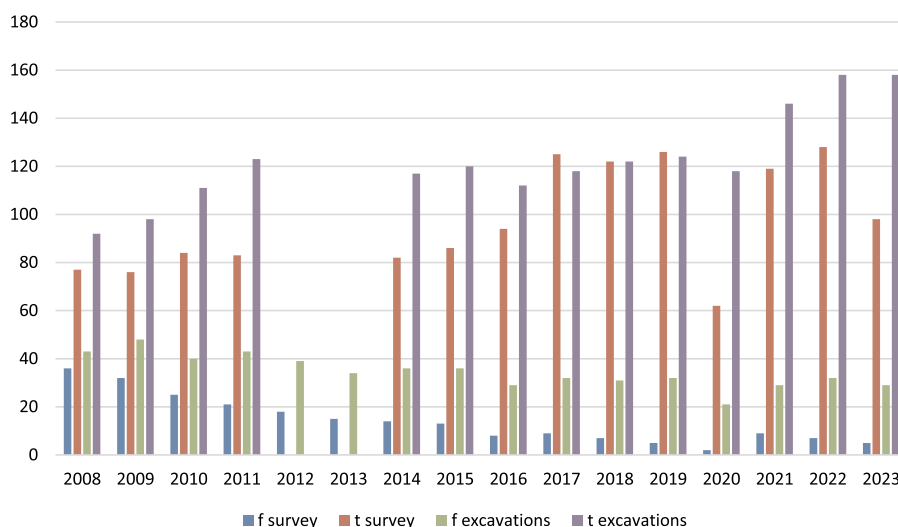


FIGURE 1 The number of foreign and Turkish archaeological excavations and surveys from 2008 to 2023, f: foreign, t: Turkish. NB. Data for Turkish projects in 2012 and 2013 not available (source: <https://kvmgm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-44150/kazi-ve-yuzey-arastirmalari-faaliyetleri.html>).

declined from about fifty to thirty excavations, and from about thirty-five surveys to five in the period between 2008 and 2023, whereas the amount of Turkish projects increased in the same period. Moreover, almost all current foreign projects are being executed by senior researchers at the end of their career, and very few new younger non-Turkish archaeologists have started projects in the country. Thus, in the near future archaeology in Türkiye will probably be mainly executed by Turkish archaeologists.

The developments that have taken place in Türkiye seem to be occurring in other countries in West Asia as well, although in many countries archaeological fieldwork is also hampered by security concerns and political and diplomatic conflicts. Hardly any archaeological work takes place in Iran, Syria, and Yemen for the latter reasons, but I think tendencies similar to those in Türkiye are also unfolding in Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan (e.g. van der Linde, 2012; Corbett, 2015).

Gatekeepers, geographies, and access in the archaeology of West Asia

Given such shifts in archaeological research practices in West Asian countries, the question of whether the archaeology of West Asia — as practised in universities in Europe, North America, and Japan at present — has a future needs to be posed. We should ask whether the changes in the archaeology of West Asia, as manifested in the rebranding of journals, institutes, and organizations, are substantial enough to ensure continued access to sites and assemblages in the future. Or are these changes better understood as mitigation measures, what Hymes (1974: 50) long ago has called ‘courtesies’, well-meant gestures that do not really change the

modus operandi of the discipline? Do we really see changes in the core agenda and power structures within the archaeology of West Asia? Here, for example, we can return to the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) shifting away from ‘Biblical Archaeology’ to ‘Near Eastern Archaeology’. While ‘Near East Archaeology’ may be a more neutral term than ‘Biblical Archaeology’, Israel is still by far the most investigated country among the archaeologists who responded in a recent survey among ASOR members (Hallote, et al., 2022), suggesting the focus of those working in the discipline has not really changed much, notwithstanding the change of (geographical) names used.

An equally important issue, however, is who sets the agenda in the archaeology of West Asia, a key question in post-colonial archaeology (Nicholas & Hollowell, 2007: 64). In 2022 the Ancient Near East Today newsletter ran a brief article entitled ‘Who Are You?’ produced by a project called ‘Academic Genealogies of Near Eastern Scholars’ (Hallote et al., 2022). What it did was try to map who the central figures were among (mainly American) archaeologists working in West Asia, by charting who have been the most prolific PhD supervisors. While one can ask questions about the methods used and the representativeness of the results, what the research did show very clearly is that a small group of key scholars have supervised the large majority of the PhDs of people working in the field (Figure 2).

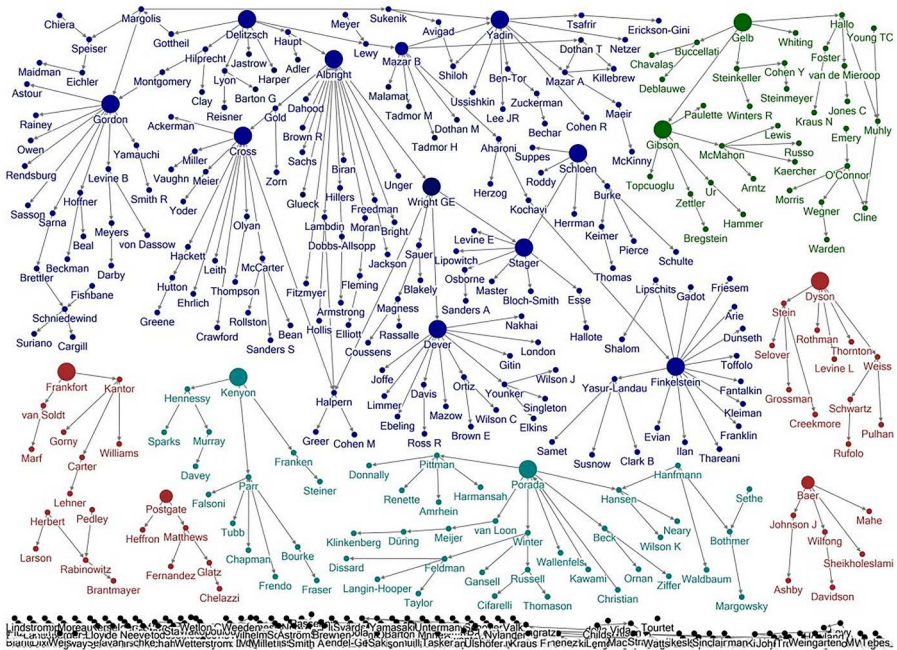


FIGURE 2 Academic family trees in West Asian archaeology, showing those with four or more scholars. Those with fewer than four people in their trees are collected at the bottom of the image. Produced by Diane Harris Cline and reproduced with permission for this publication.

While these results do not come as a surprise, and similar patterns are no doubt in place in the archaeology of West Asia in European countries as well, the graph does very clearly bring out the issue of power in the discipline. A few senior, predominantly male, archaeologists at key universities are able to control who has access to the PhD programmes that are a requirement for a career in the discipline. In this sense, these archaeologists might be labelled ‘gatekeepers’, that is those who ‘control access to benefits valued by others who are their clients’ (Corra & Willer, 2002: 180; also Voss 2021: 451). Gatekeeping in the archaeology of West Asia takes on many forms besides supervising PhDs, and includes sitting on committees in key organizations, acting as editors in the journals that are central to the field, and acting as a referee on new publications and grant applications. While refereeing tasks are not in the public domain, the key organizations and journals are. I will therefore focus here on the latter.

In the following discussion archaeologists working in West Asia will be classified as based either in the region (West Asian Archaeologist) or not (non-West Asian Archaeologists and those working for foreign institutes in the region), regardless of their nationality, in order to avoid complex arguments about who is and who is not West Asian (I do acknowledge that such a distinction does not do justice to many academics from West Asia that chose/were forced to relocate to countries elsewhere). Likewise, I will discuss whether a locus of activity, such as conference or journal headquarters, is within or without West Asia. Finally, I will consider how easy it is to access publications and events for West Asian academics.

Key organizations in the archaeology of West Asia

At present there are three main organizations in the archaeology of West Asia: ASOR, ICAANE, and ARWA, the first based in the USA and the latter two in Europe. I will discuss them in order of seniority, as this explains some of the differences in how these organizations operate.

ASOR was founded in 1900 by twenty-one academic institutions, including prominent ones such as Princeton, Yale, and Harvard. It aims to stimulate research into the ancient and recent Near East, dissemination of the results obtained, to foster quality and capacity building in research, and to stimulate outreach of research and protection of heritage. As has already been mentioned, up to recently the organization was called ‘The American Schools of *Oriental Research*’, and this was changed in 2021 to ‘American Society of *Overseas Research*’. At present ASOR is backed by fifty-three organizations in academia and heritage. It has over 2200 members and over 16,500 friends. Its executive board consists of senior Americans, some of whom are (former) scholars working on ancient West Asia, whereas others have or had careers in other fields. There are no researchers based in West Asia serving on the board. ASOR holds an annual meeting in a large and expensive hotel, such as the Hilton, in a city in the USA or Canada, such as Boston, Chicago, San Diego, Toronto, and Atlanta. ASOR published two journals: the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* and the *Bulletin of the American Society of Oriental Research*; book publications; and various more popular journals and newsletters, such as *Near Eastern Archaeology* (formerly *Biblical Archaeologist*) and *The*

Ancient Near East Today. ASOR has branch institutes in Amman, Jerusalem, and Nicosia.

Unlike ASOR, which is an explicitly American organization, which explains a lot about why its committees are staffed by Americans and its conferences take place in American cities, ICAANE, short for the *International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, is an international organization. It was first convened in 1998, and split off from the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (<https://iaassyriology.com/rencontre>), which was dominated by philological studies. ICAANE has held biannual conferences since 1998 in various European cities including Rome, Copenhagen, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, London, Warsaw, Basel, Vienna, Munich, and Bologna. Although proposals for venues in West Asia have been put forward on various occasions, they have not so far been successful. In the ICAANE conferences one of the main themes is always Islamic Archaeology, and representatives of archaeology and heritage departments of West Asian countries are always invited to participate. ICAANE as an organization is steered by an international academic committee in which senior academic staff partake at present of the following universities and institutions: Austrian Academy of Sciences; Ca' Foscari University of Venice; Johns Hopkins University; La Sapienza University of Rome; Leiden University (this author); Ludwig-Maximilians University Munich; Paris 1 Pathéon-Sorbonne; and the University of Reading. Thus, ICAANE does not have West Asian archaeologists among its board members currently, or in the past, and board members are based either at European or American universities. The ICAANE proceedings have been published predominantly with the Harrassowitz Verlag, and mainly in English, but also occasionally in other European languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, and German. The proceedings typically take the form of a number of hardbound copies that are purchased by libraries with collections on the archaeology of West Asia, although those from recent years are also available in open access through the publisher's website (https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/sequence_1029.ahtml). ICAANE does not publish journals or other types of publications.

Finally, ARWA, short for the International Association for Archaeological Research in Western and Central Asia, is the youngest organization engaging with the archaeology of West Asia, and was set up in 2020. Unlike ICAANE it is primarily an association with members, rather than an umbrella for a conference event. It was meant to transcend the traditional boundaries of West Asia by bringing in regions traditionally outside the scope of the field, such as Central Asia and the Caucasus, and to overcome the focus on antiquity, by including all periods from the Palaeolithic to the present. It uses more inclusive and post-colonial terminologies (for example, West Asia rather than the Near East), although one will search in vain in the information provided by ARWA for a critique of the problematic colonial roots of the archaeology of West Asia. ARWA, like ASOR, has an ethics charter, and organizes a series of successful online lectures and workshops. Although a biannual conference was initially envisaged to take place, none have so far been organized. ARWA publishes monographs and edited volumes with Brepols, written in English (most common), French, and German, which are available only in hard copy. ARWA has three 'administrators' and nine members on the executive board. Importantly, one of these three administrators is based in West

Asia. Apart from the one person, however, everyone else is based in Europe (specifically in Belgium, France, Germany, and the UK).

If we summarize the information on these three organizations sketched above (Table 1) we can conclude that: first, with the exception of one person in ARWA, board members are exclusively based outside West Asia; second, that large conferences focusing on the archaeology of West Asia occur exclusively in Europe and North America; and, third, that hardly any of the publications produced by these three organizations are available through open access, which means that for many scholars in West Asia these studies are effectively beyond reach. The language of publication is mainly English, but some publications in German, French, Italian, and Spanish also occur, and West Asian languages are not used for publications at all.

Finally, to my knowledge, none of these organizations provide scholarships that would allow researchers from West Asia to participate in their events. To attend ASOR or ICAANE conferences is very expensive for academics from West Asia, whose salaries are low compared to those in Europe and the USA, and access to funding is often limited (also Bernbeck, 2012: 91–93).

Key journals in the archaeology of West Asia

For this study I have selected journals that are centred at least in part on the archaeology of West Asia in the broad sense. Thus, journals that are focused mainly on a specific country, such as *Anatolica*, *Anatolian Studies*, *Iraq*, *Iran*, *Syria*, and *Tel Aviv*, have not been included in this analysis (although many of these are also heavily dominated by non-West Asian archaeologists). Likewise, I have not included journals that are broader in scope, but do also include works on West Asia, such as *Antiquity*, *Journal of World Prehistory*, the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, *World Archaeology*, and so on.

The journals under analysis here accept papers from larger parts of West Asia and from many different time periods, and are central to the practitioners of the archaeology of West Asia. The journals that seem to fit best are: *Akkadica*, the *American Journal of Archaeology* (AJA), *Ancient Near East Studies* (ANES), *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* (AAE), the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (BASOR), the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (JNES), the *Journal of*

TABLE 1

WHERE BOARD MEMBERS OF ORGANIZATIONS FOCUSING ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WEST ASIA ARE BASED, WHERE CONFERENCES TAKE PLACE, AND WHETHER PUBLICATIONS ARE PRODUCED IN OPEN ACCESS (WA = WEST ASIA, NWA = NON WEST ASIA).

Organization	Board members		Conference venues		Publications	
	WA	nWA	WA	nWA	Open access	Not open access
ARWA	x	x				x
ICAANE		x		X	x	x
ASOR		x		X		x

Note: Based on information retrieved from websites, for arwa: <https://arwa-international.org/> (30-8-2023) For ICAANE, <https://eventsignup.ku.dk/icaane13/conference> (6-12-2022), and <http://www.icaane.net/> (6-12-2022) For ASOR, <https://www.asor.org/> (31-8-2023)

Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies (JEMAHS), *Levant*, the *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient Gesellschaft (MDOG)*, *Origini*, *Paléorient*, and the *Zeitschrift für Vorderasiatische Archäologie und Assyriologie (ZA)*. Information about these journals was obtained from their webpages, which are listed in the bibliography. The languages of publication of these journals are mainly English, but French and German are also well represented. West Asian languages, by contrast, are not used in these journals.

When characterizing these journals focusing on the archaeology of West Asia in the broad sense (Table 2), a few things stand out. First, none of these journals are based in West Asia, instead their ‘headquarters’ are in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the USA. Journals based in West Asia, by contrast, tend to focus on the specific country in which they are produced. Second, the editors of the archaeology of West Asia journals are almost exclusively archaeologists based outside West Asia. Out of the twelve journals under analysis, only one has an (assistant) editor from West Asia, namely the *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies*.

Third, even the editorial and advisory boards, which in some cases can include up to thirty researchers, often do not include a single scholar from West Asia. Out of

TABLE 2

THE BASE OF OPERATIONS, COMPOSITION OF EDITORIAL AND ADVISORY BOARDS, AND OPEN ACCESS POLICIES OF KEY JOURNALS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WEST ASIA (WA = WEST ASIA; NWA = NON WEST ASIA).

Journal	Based in		Editors		Advisory board		Open access
	WA	nWA	WA	nWA	WA	nWA	
<i>AAE</i>		x		x	x	x	selection
<i>Akkadica</i>		x		x		x	no
<i>AJA</i>		x		x		x	selection
<i>ANES</i>		x		x		x	no
<i>BASOR</i>		x		x	x(1)	x	no
<i>JNES</i>		x		x			no
<i>JEMAHS</i>		x	x	x	x	x	no
<i>Levant</i>		x		x		x	selection
<i>MDOG</i>		x		x		x	yes
<i>Origini</i>		x		x		x	no
<i>Paléorient</i>		x		x			after 2 years
<i>ZA</i>		x		x		x	selection

Note: Based on information retrieved from websites, for AAE: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/16000471> (31-8-2023) For Akkadica: <http://akkadica.org/en/publications> (31-8-2023) For AJA: <https://www.ajaonline.org/about> (31-8-2023) For ANES: https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=ANES (31-8-2023) For BASOR: <https://www.asor.org/asor-publications/basor/> (31-8-2023) For JNES: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/loi/jnes> (31-8-2023) For JEMAHS: https://www.psupress.org/journals/jnls_jemahs.html?srsltid=AfmBOooezWISqtuioavpHsoOfOfcSrZTrgyFUSC1QL5NRJNyrAj72oHZ (31-8-2023) For Levant: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/ylev20> (31-8-2023) For MDOG: <https://www.orient-gesellschaft.de/publikationen/mdog.php> (31-8-2023) For Origini: <https://edizioniquasar.it/collections/origini> (31-8-2023) For Paléorient: <https://www.persee.fr/collection/paleo> (31-8-2023) For ZA: <https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/zava/html> (31-8-2023)

the twelve journals investigated here, nine have no West Asian academics at all in their editorial boards, and one journal has one (*BASOR*). The two positive exceptions to this are *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, which has three West Asian academics in its board of advisors (out of fourteen), and six West Asian academics in its editorial board (out of twenty), and, once more, the *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies*, which has six West Asian academics in its advisory board (out of thirty). As for the organizations discussed above, we can clearly see that these more recently founded journals have more inclusive compositions and more post-colonial foci in their scope.

Finally, if we look at how easy it is to read the contents of these journals for academics based in West Asia with limited institutional resources, it is clear that many of the key journals are poorly accessible. Out of the twelve journals, six are not accessible at all outside libraries with subscriptions, four journals have a selection of journal articles which are open access (usually financed by the authors or their employers), one has a moving wall of two years after which all articles are accessible (*Paléorient*), and only one (*MDOG*) is completely open access.

Discussion and conclusion

To me it seems that the archaeology of West Asia as practised by researchers from outside West Asia is at risk of becoming increasingly marginal. We can see a shift in countries in West Asia in which the terms under which foreign archaeologists are working are becoming less favourable, and the amount of investment necessary to work in archaeology has increased substantially. Here, I have used the case of Türkiye to illustrate what I believe are broader developments in West Asia. Given this situation, the question whether we are successful at shedding our colonial roots becomes all the more pertinent.

If we were to raise Edward Said from the grave and ask him to assess the state of the archaeology of West Asia today, and whether we are still dealing with a project of control, appropriation, and alienation of the cultural and linguistic heritage of (formerly) dominated countries in Asia, I am not sure his answer would be mild. Of course, the works of Said (1995 [1978]) and other post-colonial scholars have clearly impacted the archaeology of West Asia as a field of research, and there is no doubt a growing sensibility in the international archaeological community for the legacies of empire in our language (terminologies that are centred in the west, such as the Near East, the Orient, and BC, are gradually falling out of favour), in the types of things we study (the Byzantine, Sasanian, and Islamic periods are increasingly the object of research, even if the focus on the Neolithic to the Iron Age remains predominant), and in how we work in West Asia (wherever possible we work with partners, engage in capacity building, and make efforts towards societal outreach).

However, coming to terms with the colonial roots of archaeology is not simply a matter of using a less western-centred vocabulary, including periods or regions outside the traditional grand narrative of the torch of civilization, or working together with local academia and local communities (although all these things are important and need to be pursued). It is also a matter of creating a discipline

in which there is more diversity in who is in the position of gatekeeper — a position which allows specific people to exert enormous influence on the activities that take place within the archaeology of West Asia — as well as influence over where key events take place, and about making sure it is possible for academics in West Asia to access archaeological studies, resources, and events.

In this brief study I have looked primarily at how major organizations and key journals are staffed, and to what degree academics based in West Asia are represented in these institutions. The answer is that they are either not or marginally in gatekeeper positions, such as committees of international organizations, or journal editors. Major conferences focusing on the archaeology of West Asia have not taken place anywhere in West Asia, in contrast to, for example, the World Archaeological Congress and the European Association of Archaeology, which have taken place in Jordan and Türkiye respectively. Finally, although the era of open access has started over a decade ago (Maddi, et al., 2021), a large number of publications of central importance to the archaeology of West Asia are not available through open access, providing an insurmountable obstacle for academics in West Asia with limited library resources. Thus, although some changes are taking place in the archaeology of West Asia, on the whole it can still be characterized as very western-centred and hierarchically organized discipline, in which resources, prestige, and, ultimately, power, are highly unevenly spread, and in which academics from West Asia have far too little representation or access to knowledge.

A number of organizations, such as ARWA, and the JEMAHS and Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy journals, have started to address this issue by including West Asian researchers in gatekeeper positions, and this is one of the main solutions to address current imbalances in power in West Asian archaeology, alongside the need for more open access publications, and rethinking the geography of key conferences and languages of publication. These measures are highly achievable, and I argue it is time to create more inclusive configurations of gatekeepers, conference geographies, and access to resources in West Asian archaeology.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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