



PANEL DISCUSSIONS (INVITED)

Physical Worlds: Archaeology in Egyptology

Moderator: Paul T. Nicholson; Panellists: Angus Graham, E. Christiana Köhler, Kate Liska, Gregory Marouard

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Abstract

This panel considered the ways in which archaeology has come to play an increasingly important role in Egyptology and the advantages that such increased interdisciplinarity has brought. Themes that were discussed include the centrality of heritage in archaeological practice, the value of collaboration with Egyptian colleagues, and maximising available technologies to preserve heritage sites for future generations.

Keywords: archaeology, methodology, archaeological theory, history

عوامل فزيائية: علم الآثار في علم المصريات

المخلص

عملت هذه الجلسة علي تناول النواحي التي أصبح فيها علم الآثار يلعب دورًا هامًا بصورة متزايدة في علم المصريات، كما تناولت المنافع التي أدت إليها زيادة تلك التخصصات المتعددة. و اشتملت الموضوعات التي تم تضمينها علي المكانة المركزية للتراث في العمل الأثري و كذلك قيمة التعاون مع الزملاء المصريين ، بالإضافة إلي تناول أهمية الاستفادة إلي أقصى حد من التقنيات المتوفرة للعمل علي الحفاظ علي المواقع التراثية للأجيال القادمة.

الكلمات الدالة علم المصريات، علم الآثار، النهجية ، النظرية الأثرية، تاريخ

1 Egyptology and Archaeology

All disciplines are products of their history and of the times in which they developed and that is perhaps especially true of Egyptology. It is hard to comprehend that at the end of the 18th Century almost nothing was known of ancient Egypt other than the accounts of Classical authors who actually knew very little of it themselves.

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The Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt opened the eyes of the world to the glories of ancient Egypt and led to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. It was the decipherment of the hieroglyphic text on this single monument, in 1822, which many regard as marking the birth of Egyptology as a discipline. Henceforth, it was possible to read about ancient Egypt in the words of the Egyptians themselves. The subject had become an essentially literary and linguistic pursuit from which history could be reconstructed. The subject, as taught in Universities, might sit on its own, with ancient history, or in faculties of Oriental Studies. In so far as excavation was concerned, the primary purpose was to unearth further objects with text that could be used to write history, or which were *objet d'art* to be admired.

At the same time that Egyptology was developing, so archaeology was coming of age within Europe, and the question of the antiquity of humanity was being settled based, necessarily, on an understanding of stratigraphy and the study of artefacts devoid of any kind of script. The concept of stratigraphy had been borrowed from Geology, itself a relatively new discipline, and the willingness to borrow from other fields of study – to be truly interdisciplinary and integrated - has been a hallmark of archaeology ever since.

There were times when archaeology and Egyptology met, for example General Pitt-Rivers' visit to Egypt in 1881, and more generally the introduction of archaeological techniques by Flinders Petrie and George Reisner. However, into the 1970s, Egyptology continued to be primarily linguistic and though excavation techniques and recording improved they really only began to become the equal of those used in Europe or North America from the 1980s. There were exceptions of course, but the point is that Egyptology and archaeology have only grown together in relatively recent times.

This melding of archaeology and Egyptology has come at a time when the world's cultural heritage is under great threat from development and agricultural expansion and our Egyptian colleagues are continually making new discoveries as a result of such development, as well as from their own research excavations such as those at Saqqara, Giza, and elsewhere.

2 An increasingly interdisciplinary field

There are, however, problems which must be addressed. As Egyptology has become more interdisciplinary, so the range of available techniques for recording and data analysis have become greater (see 'Scanning the Horizon' panel summary, this volume (NICHOLSON, 2022)). Egyptologists are well aware of the need to use the techniques which are standard in archaeology elsewhere in the world. The use of the surveyor's total station is now common, computerised recording of contexts has been used on some excavations, and digital photography is ubiquitous.

There are, however, techniques whose use is so far uncommon in Egypt and which has led archaeologists from other regions to treat Egyptology as 'old fashioned' and reluctant to take on new methods. Such methods include accelerator mass spectrometry radiocarbon dating, drone photogrammetry, 3D printing of objects, and so on. Köhler rightly noted during the panel discussion that "heritage is at the centre of what all of us, irrespective of nationality, do". We are not only interdisciplinary in our approaches but integrated within our subject and it is to be very much hoped that there can be more integration of Egyptian and foreign scholarship and a sharing of facilities both within Egypt and abroad such that the archaeology of Egypt can enjoy the same status and results as that of Germany, the U.S.A., East Africa, and elsewhere.

The lack of opportunity to use a full range of analytical techniques in Egyptology also has sometimes affected opportunities for the funding of projects, which in turn means that money is not available for work in Egypt in the way that it might otherwise be, whether such funds go directly to our Egyptian colleagues or to foreign missions working alongside them.

However, there is another area which we should also mention here. Archaeology has, over the decades, undergone a series of great theoretical debates and some of these are now taking place within Egyptology, though with the benefit of insights gained from archaeology. It is to be hoped that such debates will be fruitful and less divisive than they have sometimes been in archaeology and that they will integrate fully with the new analytical and recording methods available.

3 Planning for the future

Continuing the historical theme, Liszka made the point that we should consider how we prepare the ground for archaeologists a century from now. Should we, for example, be conservative in what we excavate, leaving areas for excavation with techniques that we cannot yet foresee or should we rather concentrate on excavating in advance of potential urban and agricultural expansion onto archaeological sites.

The point was made that much can now be done with readily accessible technologies, notably smartphones and digital cameras, which can provide quick and efficient recording on site and which are widely available amongst our colleagues in the antiquities inspectorates and among foreign missions.

Marouard followed this theme in considering how approaches to settlement archaeology might develop in the future. Where permission is granted for their use, the employment of airborne lidar and 'drone' photography holds great promise for extensive and efficient recording of settlement sites and locating them in the landscape. He pointed out that satellite imagery is now sufficiently old that there is a bank of historical images that can be compared with more recent ones to assist in the mapping of archaeological features and to monitor agricultural and settlement encroachment. A means must be found to salvage what remains of sites which have inevitably been impacted by modern activities, both in the deserts and on the fringes of the Nile Valley.

The theme of changes was carried forward in a general discussion around traditional crafts and ancient technologies that are fast disappearing. It is both important and urgent that we collect the traditional knowledge of craftsmanship all over Egypt, not only for the study of ancient techniques but also as part of the study of Egyptian heritage, expertise, and artistry. Egyptian researchers are particularly well placed to carry out such work as they have both the linguistic skills and relative ease of access.

Graham considered the ways in which we should plan multi- / inter- disciplinary projects, noting that integration should take place at the developmental stage of the project looking at shared goals etc. from the outset, such that the publications arising from them are suitable to meet the needs of the various stakeholders, e.g. funders, the public, the academic community, and the academic needs of individual project members. This is an area which is not always considered in the planning stage, as Liszka pointed out elsewhere in the discussion. Specialists from outside archaeology/Egyptology may have specific publication requirements that fall beyond the traditional publication outlets of our discipline(s). In order that they can be fully engaged with the project it is necessary to agree at an early stage where they might publish beyond the final monograph or archaeological paper relating to the project.

Consideration was also given to the potentially negative aspects of developing technologies within archaeology/Egyptology (also considered by the 'Scanning the Horizon' panel). How do we best deal with the great quantities of data presented? How can it be adequately archived for the future, ensuring that it is migrated as and when necessary so that it remains accessible for the future?

Köhler's comment that heritage is at the centre of what all of us do was very much a fixed point in discussions and she was able to bring to bear a number of examples in support of the points made by the panel and moderator. There was general agreement that the closer integration of archaeology and Egyptology has opened new areas of

research and added depth to existing ones without either discipline losing its identity.

References

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