Making cultural history
New perspectives on Western heritage
Edited by Anna Källén
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‘And we would like to thank’
The role of funding in archaeology

Elisabeth Niklasson

There is a virus that has taken these people ... I am sure that there is a difference between people who have never done European projects and people who have done European projects.¹

To declare that funding matters for research—archaeological or otherwise—would be to state the obvious. Less obvious, and sometimes not even recognized, are the ways in which the source, form, and practices connected to financial support affect and perhaps even more, interact with research. In this essay, I argue that if we do not engage with the role of funding practices beyond its function as mere fiscal recourse and enabler, we lose sight of one important aspect of how academia interacts with society and a vital factor in knowledge production. In a wider perspective it is also a question of maintaining and expanding the range of critique in the humanities, whose authority above all lies in critical thinking. Taking the discipline of archaeology and the field of archaeological heritage as my point of departure, I will address this topic from a cultural perspective and in the context of EU funding, using the European Commission funding programme Raphael as a basis for the discussion.²
Archaeological theory and self-image

First of all, why discuss the issue of funding only in relation to the field of archaeology and archaeological heritage? What is so special about that? Do not the same issues apply to all disciplines in the humanities, or even to academe in general?

The answer is yes, these issues apply to most (if not all) disciplines on a very fundamental level. I would argue, however, that there are certain specific aspects of archaeology that make these types of questions particularly relevant. Archaeologists, ever since the subject’s institutionalization in the late nineteenth century, have maintained a special position as guardians of ‘the ancient relics’ of nation-states, and have as such, often via direct state funding or employment, been actively engaged in specific forms of identity-building. Over the last thirty years, numerous archaeologists have examined and criticized this involvement. As their findings have made painfully clear, archaeology today still carries this baggage as part of the social and political underpinnings of the discipline. Peculiarly enough, this reassessment of archaeology’s self-image, while to some extent addressing current political entanglements and social engagements, has not resulted in an equally large interest in exploring funding practices and similar interactions on a deeper level. Discussions about such matters often involve accusations about scholars ‘selling out’ rather than probing deeper into how and why perceived asymmetries between sponsor influence and recipients develop. While I may not want to bite the hand that feeds me, I believe it is important to reflect upon all aspects of archaeological practice, and in my own research, which has involved asking academics involved in EU projects what they mean by ‘Europe’ when using it as an interpretative frame, I have yet to hear a thought-out answer.

Returning to the historical engagements of archaeology, associated with what we now regard as immoral or bad causes, these engagements do not by themselves distinguish archaeology from other disciplines—archaeology is certainly not alone in harbouring a dark past—but rather it is its fundamental dependence on theory, owing to its study of human activity through very fragmentary material remains. Whether we choose to see the things archaeologists study as possessing intrinsic qualities and being capable of agency, as objective
facts or data about past societies, or as things of the present that we use to create relevant narratives about the past, we can never know that much about them or create these narratives without theory. In other words, since archaeologists and professionals working with archaeological heritage rely on things themselves rather than statements about things, and since things interpreted in a text cannot protest or state their intentions (in the way subjects of anthropology or the written sources of the historian can), theory is at the core of our practice. This demands intellectual flexibility and imagination, while at the same time being the Achilles’ heel of the field. It is one of the reasons why its practices and results are always deeply anchored to, and so easily lend themselves to, dominant ideologies and political needs. That said, all research is situated in social and political contexts, and needs theory to produce tenable knowledge, and I do not believe that archaeologists inevitably create exclusionary narratives when interacting with political agendas. But because of our dependence on theory, there is both a great potential and a great danger to archaeology that motivates continuous self-examination.

**Simply practicalities? Archaeology and its ‘context’**

Having just claimed that archaeology easily lends itself to political needs, I would immediately like to reassess this statement with the following question: how can funding sources be seen as interacting with the field rather than merely affecting it?

When I started my doctoral research in 2011, I thought I was going to study whether, and if so how, archaeological projects co-funded by the European Union are influenced by their major funding sources. This was based on the assumption that archaeologists running EU projects, having been selected in a blind review process, would be passive recipients, maintaining little or no interaction with the EU, and without any real feedback into the organization. After conducting interviews with EU officials handling culture policy and programmes, as well as archaeologists and heritage experts, it became apparent that this assumption was not only inaccurate, but also simplistic. The interaction among archaeologists on the one hand, and between heritage experts and the EU on the other,
started long before the projects were initiated and often continued long after the projects were completed.\(^6\)

A distinction between practice and context is often made in discussions about the conditions for doing archaeology, by claiming that politics is about the context in which archaeology takes place, or how the results are used, rather than being an integral part of the practice. This is a stance that reduces funding sources, permits, and similar things to being necessary, but for the research process, quite irrelevant external circumstances. Michael Shanks has taken issue with this distinction by talking of a ‘political economy of the discipline of archaeology’.\(^7\) In his view, archaeology is seen as a mode of cultural or scientific production rather than scientific discovery; a ‘hybrid process of heterogeneous engineering’ in which the remains of the past are translated through the cultural and political interests of the present, thereby making the politics of archaeology into an ‘ecology of mobilizing resources, managing, organising, persuading’.\(^8\) In this ecology, all parts of archaeological practice are significant—and are wrapped up in its epistemology, from tourist experiences and trade in illicit antiquities, to local planning through to national and international agendas. Seen from this perspective, funding sources are not only a necessity, but can also be a dynamic and creative part of archaeology and heritage management. While not solving the paradox that those archaeologists trying hard to be relevant to current society have sometimes been perceived as corrupted or unscientific,\(^9\) it does shift the focus from the holy grail of untainted empirical enquiry to a more prismatic view of archaeological practice.

Calling for a broadening of the range of criticism in science, the feminist philosopher Kathryn Pyne Addelson has discussed the role of funding in relation to the concept of ‘cognitive authority’, a concept that can be connected to Shanks ‘ecology’. The cognitive authority of specialists in science, and indeed academia as a whole, lies in their social arrangements and positions of power, allowing them to spread their metaphysical commitments by telling other researchers what their problems should be. According to Addelson,

If we think of science as a stock of knowledge embodied in theories, then the problem of funding does not seem to be a problem ha-
Given that funding creates better opportunities for researchers within the dominant traditions to exercise cognitive authority and to help others of their own metaphysical persuasion to rise through the ranks, thereby gaining even more funding, it becomes clear how funding influences the organization and contents of the sciences at any given historical moment, and how ‘it influences the way we all will come to understand the world’.  

Both Shanks’s and Addelson’s concepts can be useful in an analysis of the interaction between funding sources and the field of archaeology and archaeological heritage, albeit with some modification. By acknowledging cognitive authority, we can visualize prestige hierarchies and the way they operate with the help of funding mechanisms, but most likely at the expense of the agency of the funding source itself. In Shanks’ ‘ecology’, on the other hand, where all parts involved in the research process are taken into consideration, we risk ending up without any clear nodal points where different articulated positions are structured. Combined, they allow greater focus in analysis while at the same time recognizing power imbalances between different elements. It is important to distinguish between the discourses upholding political funding initiatives on one hand, and projects that spring from the discipline of archaeology on the other. But it is no less important to understand that it is at the meeting-point where archaeologists’ ideas and practices and EU political structures interact and are blurred, oppose one another and become part of one another, that things become really interesting.

The Raphael Programme

In the early 1990s, after the European Community had been reinvented as the European Union, the now reinvigorated European Commission (EC) felt that something had to be done to bring Europe closer to the people. In this pursuit, cultural heritage—a resource
thought to ‘perfectly illustrate the regional, national and European roots of Europe’s citizens’ was to play an important part. Even if the search for a usable past, suitable for the ‘new’ Europe, had been going on since the 1970s, it had mostly consisted of sporadic cultural actions such as the funding of restoration projects on archaeological heritage sites of ‘European significance’. These early efforts had remained limited for several reasons, not least lack of interest and money, but also—and this is something that is still evident in negotiations on the EU level—because the field of cultural heritage was jealously guarded by the nation-states, leaving little room for supranational initiatives. After 1993, when the Maastricht Treaty came into effect and the EU finally had a legal incentive to act in the field of culture, a number of programmes and experimental actions were launched. Among these was the Raphael Programme, which ran between January 1997 and December 1999. It supported networking, training, development, and research activities for projects ‘designed to highlight common cultural heritage features and transnational cross currents that have contributed to the emergence of a common cultural heritage’. It was one of few funding programmes within the EU entirely dedicated to cultural heritage, and it contributed with a total of ECU 30 million, allocated to 222 projects.

Within this programme there were several types and layers of interaction, all deeply intertwined. Here I will focus on three of these. The first one takes place before the launch of the programme. Already in 1992, a potential action was discussed with ‘professionals in the field of movable and built heritage’, and by 1996, ten meetings with national representatives and independent heritage experts had been held. At this time there was a growing networking activity among the elites in this field, particularly owing to the Council of Europe’s recently developed European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1992), which was followed by a campaign co-financed by the EU, ‘The Bronze Age Campaign’ (1994–1997). This campaign, which later came under attack for tipping into political propaganda, emphasized the Bronze Age as a prosperous period when Europe became truly connected for the first time. In fact, some projects that later obtained Raphael funding were initiated and developed as a result of this campaign. Also, in
the midst of this activity, the European Association of Archaeologists was established in 1994. These were not in any way isolated events and the same experts figured in several frameworks. Taken together, these pre-programme interactions had a substantial impact on both the definition of heritage and the selected areas for action within the Raphael Programme. Thus, the EU officials could work towards their policy goals sanctioned by the support of professionals, who in their turn succeeded in safeguarding established hierarchies of cognitive authority on a supranational level.

My second example concerns the interaction between the review panels of independent experts and the EU Raphael committee, which consisted of representatives from EU institutions and member states’ heritage sectors. Here the political economy of persuading and mobilizing resources is evident from a number of angles. As declared earlier, many in the group of experts assigned to evaluate project applications were already active in the pre-programme phase and in other pan-European networks, and while they participated independently of national agendas, it was stated by a Commission employee overseeing the selections that:

In theory everybody was there in a personal position and not in an institutional position, but in practice actually you knew the experts had their own agenda and they had been instructed by the national agencies in order to push this and that project.\(^{21}\)

Consequently, if experts endorsed both their own interests and fields of expertise, along with the priorities of the member states, all while evaluating projects based on criteria aimed at increasing EU integration—such as ‘European dimension and enhancement of the common cultural Heritage’\(^{22}\)—it makes little sense to talk about an independent selection process with minimal interaction between layers. One of the experts involved at the time was even under the strong impression that some projects were chosen beforehand, leaving little for the experts to do but to rubberstamp the unspoken agenda set by those higher up in the prestige hierarchy, thereby reducing their task to giving the right projects the ‘right’ grades.\(^{23}\) Lastly, to muddle things further, manoeuvring between these layers we find
archaeologists hired by the EC as internal consultants, working with the Commission, the expert panels, and the applicants.

So what happened after the programme was wound up? While it is clear from the project summaries that the European theme was embraced on a content level—with projects carrying out ‘comparative research into the first highly advanced European cultures’ and ‘showing the European public the existence of a common culture … through the promotion of rock paintings’—the most significant effect was the Europeanization of infrastructures within these fields and of professionals themselves.

[After the Raphael Programme] I remember that I asked myself: what are the real traces that this programme has left apart from the political sentences? And probably it’s not a very high result, but the interpersonal relations that have been developed, the certain taste for Europe that has been developed within people that didn’t have that experience before … that’s concrete results … you see that they become real kind of Europe addicts.

I believe it is in this context that issues of reflexivity and accountability have to be addressed, because while the creation of networks and increased communication are largely positive and can be a way to break out of national frames, it is also important to question the ‘new’ frames we erect around our work. To work with and within European or EU frameworks—nowadays habitually conflated—without further reflection might in the long term reinforce borders to ‘non-European’ issues and cooperation rather than challenge them. The observation by archaeologist Mark Pluciennik fifteen years ago that ‘It seems highly unlikely that archaeologists suddenly will be swept up in a wave of exclusivist, pro pan-European or culture historical propaganda’ is still valid. Nevertheless, since then surprisingly few scholars in the field of archaeology and archaeological heritage have looked deeper into the effects of increased EU cooperation, ignoring Pluciennik’s plea to all archaeologists to ‘consciously, as part of our task, work deliberately on the margins of any proposed “European” boundaries’.
Funding matters
At this point I hope to have offered some clues as to why writing an application, participating as an expert in a review panel, or giving one’s expert opinion in political consultations, can be considered as a form of interaction rather than a passive or peripheral activity. Using examples from the EU funding programme Raphael, I have argued that there are several levels and types of interactions occurring when a funding initiative is developed, and that they all matter. They matter for the hierarchies of prestige and the ability of professionals to exert cognitive authority in their fields. They matter for the infrastructure and political economies of disciplines. They also matter for the EU, an institution that is still in need of a public ethos (perhaps now more than ever), and whose rhetoric to a great extent still relies on a grand narrative of pan-European ‘Unity in Diversity’, stretching back to and sometimes beyond Ancient Greece. I am not trying to expose some sort of conspiracy here, and for the people involved in review panels and the development of political funding schemes, this probably will not come as any real news. The point is that these practices need to be reflected upon and incorporated as integral parts in any project dealing with cultural heritage and archaeology, especially those interacting with programmes working towards political goals. Thus, this is not to say that we should stay away, but rather that we need to get more involved, raise more questions, and expand our range of critique. Apart from active participation in debates outside our disciplinary and institutional borders, I believe we need to take a more stringently critical cultural history approach as the point of departure for inquiries into the spaces of tension between the politics of culture and the culture of politics.

Notes
1 Interview code OT-03 2012. Interviews cited have been conducted by the author with ex-European Commission employees as part of the project ‘Framing the past in the political space?: Archaeology as “European added value”’. Interviews are cited in the original language.
2 By the field of archaeological heritage I am referring to researchers and professionals working with the material remains of the past as their main category in know-
ledge production. Apart from archaeologists, this includes conservators, restorers, heritage-site developers and managers, archaeological museum managers, and so on.

3 For a general overview, see Trigger 2006.

4 See, for example, Atkinson et al. 1996; Díaz-Andreu García 2007; Kohl & Fawcett 1996.


6 Interaction refers to everything from direct exchange of ideas through lobbying and stakeholder meetings, to more indirect ways of relating to the political policy goals of funding programmes in project applications or reports.

7 Shanks 2004, 497.

8 Ibid. 503.

9 King 1983.

10 Addelson 2004, 177.

11 Ibid. 180.


13 The Treaty on European Union was signed on 7 February 1992 by the members of the European Community in Maastricht, Netherlands. It came into force on 1 November 1993.


16 Shore 2010.


18 The European Currency Unit (ECU) was a basket of European Community currencies, used as the unit of account before being replaced by the euro at a ratio of 1:1 on 1 January 1999.

19 For information about the meetings see documents cited above, n. 14 & n. 15.

20 For critique see Gramsch, 2000; Bolin & Hauptman-Wahlgren 1996.

21 Interview code OT-03 2012.


23 Interview code OT-02 2012.


25 Interview code OT-03 2012.

26 Pluciennik 1998, 821.

27 Ibid. 822.

28 These aspects are connected to the great body of work dealing with mechanisms of influence and interaction within and between sciences, disciplines, societal norms, and politics, developed by scholars such as Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn for the sociology of knowledge, and Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway for the philosophy of science.

29 The official motto of the EU since 2000.

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"AND WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK"

References


