

Approaches to Disruptions and Interactions in Archaeology

Proceedings of the Graduate Archaeology
at Oxford Annual Conferences in 2017-2019

Edited by

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Access Archaeology





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Introduction

Penny Coombe and Ying Tung Fung

This volume is a collection of some of the papers presented at the Graduate Archaeology at Oxford Conferences over the years 2017, 2018, and 2019. The GAO conference has become an annual fixture in the calendar of graduate study in the School of Archaeology in Oxford, typically held in the spring each year and organised by graduate students from the School. The aims of the conferences have been primarily to provide a platform for graduate students and early career researchers to share their work, and to encourage discussions and connections amongst scholars from different fields within archaeology. Researchers in Oxford, but also from around the world, have come together to share ideas and their ongoing work under a chosen theme. Time has also been spent in visiting the University Museums, such as the Ashmolean Museum, and sharing ideas during break-out sessions. It has generated vibrant discussions, developed important networks and contacts, and raised the profile of archaeology around Oxford and more widely. In total, around 150 delegates participated, approximately 80 papers were presented, and 20 posters were displayed in the three conferences represented in this volume. We are grateful to all attendees for their fantastic contributions during the conference and published here. The book represents just a small part of the wider benefits and results of the GAO conferences over the three years.

Putting on a conference of this scale and so being able to realise these benefits represents a great team effort, and the present editors would like to express considerable thanks and recognise the work of a number of people. First, the conference organisers who made each event happen. The organisers in 2017 were Kira Hopkins, Hannah Ringheim and Mariana Castro, with support from Rebecca O’Sullivan (GAO President) and the 2016-17 GAO Committee; the organisers in 2018 were Penny Coombe and Rebecca Smith, with support from Siobhan Shinn (President) and the 2017-18 GAO Committee; in 2019, the organisers were Ying Tung Fung with support from Emanuele Prezioso, Shengyu Wang, along with Gian Piero Milani (President) and the 2018-19 GAO Committee. We have been most grateful for practical and financial assistance from the School of Archaeology, the Faculty of Classics, the Meyerstein Fund, and the Craven Committee all at the University of Oxford, which ensured that costs for participants could be kept low or free. We received great support from senior faculty members in Archaeology and Classics, especially the Directors of Graduate Studies, who kindly sponsored applications for funding, and senior professors who came to the events to meet students. Many thanks too to colleagues in the Ashmolean Museum for offering great tours to conference delegates. The keynote speakers at each conference offered great food for thought, and we thank them for their generous participation, sharing their knowledge and advice for the future: Prof Martin Carver in 2017; Prof Naomi Sykes and Dr Lisa Lodwick in 2018; and Dr Amy Richardson and Dr Susanne Hakenbeck in 2019.

In preparing this volume, we have been particularly grateful for the generous assistance of the peer-reviewers, who have offered valuable advice and support to develop the work of contributors as well as ensuring quality. The efforts to produce this volume have undergone a couple of iterations, and tremendous early work in preparing this volume by Rebecca Smith, Kira Hopkins, Hannah Ringheim, and Mariana Castro, as well as Penny Coombe, who continued as editor, is gratefully acknowledged here.

One of the tasks for the organisers of the annual conference is to select a theme for that year which will appeal to students across all parts of the archaeological spectrum: from folks working to analyse volcanic tephra to those looking at Roman sculpture, from graduate scholars working on palaeolithic flint scatters to colleagues understanding the petrography of ceramics from China. We have been conscious that the archaeological community, at Oxford at least, is spread across different buildings and is engaged in an amazing range of aspects of archaeology, but that sometimes this can feel rather disparate. Programmes of study include, for instance, archaeology, classical archaeology, archaeological and earth sciences, oriental studies and history, bridging the humanities and social sciences. It was important to us that *all* researchers felt welcome and inspired to contribute their work to the conference programmes, and that the themes could be explored from a range of methodological or theoretical positions. Indeed, one of the key achievements of the GAO conferences has been to develop understanding of the richness and broad scope of archaeology, to appreciate what we have in common as well as where our research differs, and to build supportive connections.

The current volume is, therefore, by its nature an amalgam of several themes chosen for the three conferences it represents and is wide ranging in its subject matter. It is striking, however, that there is such overlap between the concepts and themes selected. These included movement, conflict, organisation, chaos, interactions through trade, human-environment relationships, and emergence of cultural identities. The emphasis is on fault lines and connections, on where groups of people or kinds of objects can be said to begin or end, change or continue, implying that there are ways to categorise and sort out one from another - but also significant occasions and processes when these arrangements are disrupted or transcended. This speaks to a dual preoccupation within archaeology of being able to apply methods and to construct organisation, at the same time as identifying and understanding the circumstances in which deviations and evolutions occur.

Interaction, or complex connectivity and globalisation, discussed in this volume refers to a process that shows how everything could be connected over space and through time. Such connections need not always be global or long distance, but can be multi-scaler, from local and regional to global levels. This connection can apply to various objects not limited to people and societies, but also artefacts, materials, construction, environment, landscape and ecosystem. The volume covers the topics of materiality and agency, which emphasise the active role of humans, and how they may have interacted with materials and artefacts in the past, along with the more conventional topics of population movement, human communication and contact, trading, and idea and knowledge transmission. All these topics are useful in understanding spatial and temporal changes, as well as meanings and functions of objects in different scopes. Specifically, the topics discussed in this volume ranging from coins in Roman Britain, sites in Portugal, to the Silk Road(s), Japanese fans and Chinese construction. This way of examining interaction allows us a more neutral and open discussion than using approaches such as world system theory or core-periphery models, which inherently assume that a hierarchical structure was involved between societies. The newer concepts of human-object interaction, materiality and agency, which have become popular in the past twenty years, also allow us to explore interaction between human and non-living entities, offering a different angle to study interaction and understand the human past to a fuller extent.

The papers presented here draw out various facets of these main themes. Gomes discusses migration and intercultural contact at the time of Phoenician colonisation in the Sado river valley in Portugal. His careful analysis of changing landscape and site patterns, as well as developments in material culture highlight the difficulty of finding evidence for movement of people within the archaeological record, tapping into long-held questions of how site formation

or material culture map onto changing human groups. Gomes seeks to go further than traditional binary groupings of 'indigenous' or 'native' vs 'coloniser', recognising that neither category is monolithic nor clear-cut. His conclusion emphasises the nuance of different scales of interaction (local, regional, trans-regional), as well as the use of certain aspects (which might be called technologies) to understand consistency and change apparent in the archaeological record.

Wang continues the theme of movement, emphasising the realities of traversing Eurasia along the so-called 'Silk Road(s)' in the mid-1st millennium AD, with archaeology and material culture brought to the fore. Emphasis is placed upon the various polities involved in constructing routes and contacts in the region in a variety of ways, and on the harshness of the environment which was traversed by travellers to reach different places. The city of Turfan serves as an excellent case study for understanding the practicalities of trade here, the role of smaller networks in facilitating longer-range routes, as well as the opportunity for mercantile contacts to bring not only goods but ideas and cultural exchange. Indeed, there is the suggestion that trade routes might be by-products of interaction in other ways or the result of other needs.

The 'east' and the 'west' form the basis for an archaeological comparison of Japanese fans in current museum collections by Hitchcock. The range of forms and uses of the fan is striking, and the author emphasises the variety of contexts and ways in which they operated in the east. In the west, the fashions of the 19th century saw Japanese object and design in high demand, alongside critiques of this 'Orientalism' and reductive study of their typology and display in private collections. Museums offer the potential to set the multiplicity of forms and uses of fans into their nuanced artistic and anthropological contexts. Ultimately, however, the Hitchcock's conception of the 'fan' as an assemblage rather than a single kind of object offers the significant potential both to understand their role in constructions of 'east' and 'west' and to examine and engage with them more fully as archaeological artefacts on their own terms.

From considerations of the movements and changing perspectives over time and space of the first three papers, Gautam takes us in a new direction: chaos in urban archaeology of the city of Allahabad in India. Threats to heritage and archaeological sites in the city are chaotic and manifold, but urban development and all that goes with it is perhaps pre-eminent. However, the author proposes tourism and education about the rich archaeological resources of the city as potential salves to these issues. Fundamental steps such as mapping sites and training of archaeological staff are required, but would reap great opportunities for management of the cultural heritage of this incredible city.

Broadening this theme of chaos, Frampton focuses in her paper on the presentation of order as well as chaos within classical theatrical productions and at museum late opening or live events. Ancient concepts of order and chaos are given a contemporary twist and analysis, through discussion of space, their setting, and the relationships and emphasis thereby constructed or brought to bear. Examples range from translating the fictional to real-life in Oxford's *Alice Day*, to a retelling of Euripides' *Hecuba* with the impact of migration in the eastern Mediterranean brought centre-stage, literally, through the location of the production on the Greek island of Delos.

Wu focuses on exploring 'east' and 'west' interaction, through examining the architectural structure of the iron-and-glass pavilion of Lingzhao Xuan 靈沼軒 in the Forbidden City in China. She emphasises that this structure represents a trans-mundane space, which followed the tradition of Chinese imperial garden aesthetics. The embodiment of such a cosmological trans-mundane space is characterised by the architectonic idea of 'Immortal Mountain rising from Numinous Pond' and the auspicious meaning hidden behind the construction of the

underground 'Water Palace', along with the introduction of European building materials and engineering technologies.

In contrast, Yang's paper adopts a relatively new approach to consider the formation of the site structure of the Buddhist grottoes constructed in the early seventh century in Northern Sichuan. She argues that the Sui-dynasty Daoist sites in this region pioneered the use of the niche-based site structure, and local agency was important for the innovation of niche form and rock-carving practices. Her research provides an alternative approach, aside from interaction and transmission from different regions, allowing us to understand the arrival, adoption, and adaptation of religious rock-carving practices from a new perspective.

Crump provides a different way to explore interaction. He applies a bottom-up approach in this paper, which focuses on how people interacted with, used, and understood coins. His research considers the concepts of literary theory, linguistics, and philosophy, and integrates context, identity, engagement, agency, and interpretation to examine coins and coin data. By using the case study of Roman coins in Britain, this approach has given us a new insight that the meaning and function of coins can be flexible and varied.

We may conclude that, often, definitions and distinctions can be a mirage, and it is interaction and mobility that characterises much of the past. By looking across perceived boundaries, we may understand them better; and by interacting in a conference setting, we may break down or remove the barriers within the scholarship and within the discipline of archaeology to focus on what connects us as a group of students and Early Career Scholars engaging with aspects of the material culture of the past. We are conscious that many of our contributors are at an early stage in their careers and we are delighted to be able to present their work. We hope the volume will be of interest to a range of readers and that it will be read with an eye to the future potential of the ideas, interpretations, and the emerging scholars showcased here.