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## **Some Aspects of the History and Theory of Classical Archaeology**

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### **Abstract**

One of the important dimensions of the analyzes of the professional history of science is the critical focus that questions the state of the art, the history and the perspectives of a certain scientific field or a whole discipline. This type of analyzes have a very ambitious goal to scrutinize not just the state of the art, the subject of the research and the misconceptions of the wider audience, but the misgivings of the scientific theories and the misconceptions of the scientists themselves. In other worlds, the critical approach to the history and theory of certain scientific field puts into question the motives, clarity and the self-awareness of the scientific mind.

This paper approaches some of the less examined or acknowledged aspects of the development of classical archaeology that influence its' perspectives and wider role in the societies even today. While it remains focused of the history of classical archaeology, the paper articulates as well few specific and, in many aspects, authentic approaches to the wider trends of rethinking the history of archaeology as a discipline.

**Keywords:** classical archaeology; history of archaeology; nationalism; identities.

### **1. Introduction**

The analyzes contributing to the professional history of a particular scientific discipline or scientific focus might be categorized into two basic groups developing in different directions for scientific as well as practical use.

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In this context, there is a group of scholars that make huge and methodologically demanding efforts with a main goal to standardize the state of the art, in order to make some structure in the growing body of scientific literature in a particular field. The benefits of such focus are of crucial importance in relation to the popularization of the knowledge of a certain scientific field among the wider public or creation of standardized educational curriculums, thus educating the new generations and acquainting them with continuous scientific advancements.

Yet, another dimension of the analyzes of the professional history of science is the critical focus that questions the state of the art, the history and the perspectives of a certain scientific field or a whole discipline. This type of analyses have a very ambitious goal to scrutinize not just the state of the art, the subject of the research and the misconceptions of the wider audience, but the misgivings of the scientific theories and the misconceptions of the scientists themselves. In other worlds the critical approach to the history of science puts into question the motives, clarity and the self-awareness of the scientific mind.

This particular approach to the history of science has become dominant especially in the field of social sciences and humanities in the last two decades. At the same time, the importance of its findings has not just enlarged the body of particular literature but also placed the professional history in the center of the scientific debates of many contemporary scientific fields.

In line with this contemporary approaches in the scientific research, this paper presents, analyzes, discusses and anticipates some of the latest researches, theories and tendencies in the wider field of archaeology and especially in the contemporary scientific treatment of the professional history of archaeology. Based on this comprehensive spectrum of contemporary analyses and results, the paper aims to formulate the basic contours, hypotheses and understandings of the new scientific trends in the history of archaeology. These wider analyses of the new trends in archaeology as a scientific discipline represent a basic precondition for our more specific scientific focus, argumentation and conclusions.

Thus, this paper approaches some of the less examined or acknowledged aspects of the development of classical archaeology that influence its' perspectives and wider role in the societies even today. While it remains focused on the history of classical archaeology, the paper articulates as well few specific and, in many aspects, authentic approaches to the wider trends of rethinking the history of archaeology as a discipline. At the same time, it makes an effort for contribute meaningfully to the growing body of scientific research that take a multidisciplinary approach relating the archaeological research and phenomena to those of numerous other scientific disciplines.

## **2. History of Archaeology in its post-modern stage of development**

The contemporary view on history of archaeology, requires from us to anticipate and follow the contemporary tendencies of the last decades, when the social and humanistic sciences go through a vigorous process of self-reflection, putting into question their basic premises and key methodologies. This new developments constantly remind us on the contemporary dilemmas of the possibilities for scientific research and very existence of these

scientific fields apart from the interactions with the dimensions of social, cultural and artistic.

In the scope of these scientific tendencies lays as well the latest research focus of some of the world's leading scholars and authorities in the field of archaeology that extend this scientific field in new directions and open new and unusual scientific dilemmas. In this context, one of the most intriguing questions for the contemporary archaeological research is the relation of archaeology to the national and other identities and self-representations, as well as the potential influence of this relation over the scientific objectivity, the scientific methods and the proposed scientific facts.

Thus, the last decades have seen a turn from the encyclopedically organized and fact-focused editions on archaeology and its professional history, like those of Michaelis, Glyn Daniel or Gran Aymerich [1], towards the more critical and multidisciplinary approaches of Trigger [2], Diaz-Andreu and Paterson [1]. Today, these researchers, together with other prominent scholars, like Jones, Eriksen, Kohl, Fawcett, Casella, Champion, Fowler and Thomas [3,4,5,6,7], as well as the most prominent archeological editions [8,9,10,11], have moved from the early critical position that "most archaeological traditions are probably nationalistic in orientation" [1,2], leaning with their analyses towards the updated position that "all archaeological traditions were originally nationalistic", motivated and in mutual relationship with nationalism and other collective identities and the political opportunities [1].

At the same time, we have to bear in mind the contemporary trends in the other scientific disciplines, like the political science, theory of nation and nationalism, cultural studies or the theory of international relations, that have reintroduces the important position and role of identities, symbols and culture. Thus, these scientific disciplines, some of them considered less related to archaeology in the past, have also made their own steps towards integration of archaeology in their interdisciplinary research matrix. Thus, for example, in the theory of international relations the dominant contemporary tendencies, led by the theories of the constructivists, place identities, cultural symbols and social relations in the center of both policy making and global relations. However, the obvious relationship of archaeology with the creation of identities, cultural symbols and social relations, and the influence of the archeological results and side effects in the global relations have just begin to surface as an integral field of scientific interest.

Therefore, the particular focus of this paper is the early history of classical archaeology and its profound impact on identities, culture and politics in different regions of the world.

### **3. Some important aspects of the history and theory of classical archaeology**

In the time of its early development classical archaeology was considered much closer to the "truths" of our past than the dominant classical linguistics. It brought to light a spectrum of cultures and artefacts, not known to the researchers and enthusiasts of this limited historical and geographic qualification known as "the classical period". It took some time in some of the societies to swallow the "barbaric" esthetics and image of the artifacts, but on the end of this process most national contexts and protagonists have acclaimed archaeologists as ultimate authorities on our distant past.

Whoever, the recent self-reflective, highly critical and multidisciplinary approaches in different social sciences and humanities including archaeology have brought to light many biased elements, mistakes and sometime serious misconceptions produced or at least supported by the work and efforts of the classical archaeology. Thus, while inaugurated as a democratic force in the archaeological work and research in the nineteenth century, archaeology has transformed, according to many researchers into the most utilized branch of archaeology in the national projects of the twentieth century.

The only way to apprehend these specific potential of archaeology is to go back to its roots and reconsider some of the aspects of its professional history. Therefore this overview of the very beginnings of the classical archaeology will have a decisively different approach, analyzing the professional history of the science not as a separate process but as historical process closely related to its contexts, or maybe even its own byproduct.

### ***3.1. Theories of the classical archaeology and the roots of nationalism***

The classical archaeology has its roots in the centuries-long interest for the Mediterranean cultures by western European elites. Through this process of travel, exploration, study, and publication, classical archaeology emerged as a distinctive branch of learning connected with antiquarianism as closely as with other branches of Classical learning.

The birth of classical archaeology, as a dominant field of interest, coincides with the professional growth of archaeology from laymen interest into professional scientific discipline. One of the perceptible changes that characterized the growth of classical archaeology during the 19th century is its increasing association and interrelation with the creation of contemporary political identities. In this context the classical archaeology, its professional history and some of the main paradigms of its theory are related to the developments of nationalism and racist theories. Additionally, it has already been noted among the scholars in the United States that Napoleon, and the French imperialistic policies were placing great attention and relevance to Rome and Italy. Paradoxically, another early example is offered by the Emperor Napoleon and his systematic exploration of the buildings and artifacts of Rome during that city's French occupation. A deliberate association was created between ancient Rome and Napoleon's empire so the physical remains of the past were given considerable and careful attention (Ridley 1992). To understand Napoleon's archaeological ambitions we have to remember the central role that Roman classicism had played in the events leading up to the French Revolution and to the various post revolutionary governments that preceded his.

But after the fall of Napoleon and the French domination, the new theories of the German scholars developed the basis of the "concept of culture". The idea behind such concept was that Germans and other not-French elites were not obliged to follow the French cultural endeavor. In the new theory of the world, they were not rural or less elaborated. In contrary, they were a separate culture and less elaborated its forms were it was proclaimed to be better in the sense of cultural "pureness".

Later, the newly unified states of Italy and Greece also looked back to the past to create their own individual national identities in the present. In Italy, archaeological exploration and display of imperial monuments were

key instruments in creating Rome as the capital of the new state. In Greece, a parallel process involved defining a particular golden age—the great age of Pericles—as a symbol of national identity at the expense of later periods of “foreign occupation,” the evidence of which came to be deliberately cleared away. Otto, the German Greek king largely supported the rebuilding from dust of the new capital Athens and the “second city” Sparta.

Nationalism has undoubtedly provided an important impetus to the systematic exploration of the past, and the classical archaeology as its main exploration tool through its paradigms made the cultural and identity infrastructure of the future nations.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The classical archaeology was born in the downs of the nationalistic revolution in Europe. Its founding scientific efforts were filled with enthusiasm for the new scientific discoveries and worldviews, but also crammed with misconceptions of the new identity changer and social reformer – the nationalism. Therefore, looking into the roots and beginnings of the classical archaeology we will find some of the founding stones of the archaeology as in independent scientific discipline, but also some of the founding principles and dogmas of nationalism that remain important aspect of our contemporary global challenges.

In this context, observing the overall history of classical archaeology through the analytic and self-reflective magnifying glass of the postmodern science we might distinguish the wide overlap of the scientific, political and cultural in this specific area of archaeological interest. Yet, like in the cases of other related disciplines, while the influences are present and have to be acknowledged, we have to be aware that these very influences represented at the same time the basic motives that pushed different scientific fields in the directions of their professional development.

Finally, throwing some additional light on the roots of the classical archaeology, we might conclude that they were very political and nationalistic, but these egoistic motives created the scientific focus and methods of the classical archaeology and pushed the archaeology into a process of professional growth as an independent scientific discipline [3].

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