

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN EUROPE: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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The relation between academic archaeology and modern heritage resource management has changed everywhere in Europe under the influence of the revised European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, also known as the Malta Convention.<sup>1</sup> In many countries the implementation of this convention has led to drastic changes in the way in which society deals with the resource that is constituted by our archaeological heritage. The financial and legal basis for managing that heritage and for the work of archaeologists has improved greatly and in most of Europe the uncontrolled losses of archaeological remains that were reason for great political concern in the 1980's,<sup>2</sup> have been stopped.

One would assume, therefore, that archaeologists all over Europe would be quite satisfied about the way in which our discipline has developed over the past 20 years. Quite to the contrary, however, there is great concern, because the practice of archaeology has changed such a great deal. Archaeology is no longer just an academic

discipline but it has become part of the planning process. Although the scope of the legal obligations varies from country to country, the impact of development on archaeological resources must be taken into account almost everywhere. This has created a vast increase in archaeological fieldwork that is normally referred to as contract archaeology and is nowadays also described as 'preventive' and 'compliance-driven' archaeology, while in the past it was mostly 'rescue archaeology' and 'research-driven'.

There are significant differences in the way in which the Malta Convention is being implemented in European countries. In my opinion, there are three models how this is being done, depending on political views and to legal notions about the role of the state and private property. In addition, there exist different opinions about the nature of archaeological work. In France, for example, all archaeological work is seen as *research* on behalf of the state. In a country such as the UK, archaeological work is seen as a *service*, not unlike many

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other services that can be bought and sold. Related to this are different political views on the usefulness of such things as a free market and the desirability to allow 'market principles' to operate in the field of culture; and also on the need for, and the degree to which a market needs to be regulated, or the quality of work controlled.

These differences have led to different systems by which the Malta Convention is being implemented. There are two basic questions:

- does the state consider archaeological work to be a service, or does it not;
  - does the state wish to control the quality of archaeological work or does it not.
- If you put these into a diagram, you get

4 different options (Fig. 1). One of the boxes is empty, and the situation where a country does *not* consider archaeological work to be a service and at the same time is *not* interested in exercising control over the work that is being done, by whatever means, appears not to exist.

In practice, there are thus three different systems in existence. I shall begin with a model that was adopted in a very explicit form in the Netherlands but that exists in many other countries. In my country, the political decision has been that a market for archaeological services should be created in which 'market principles' apply. Private excavation companies are allowed to offer their services in competition with each

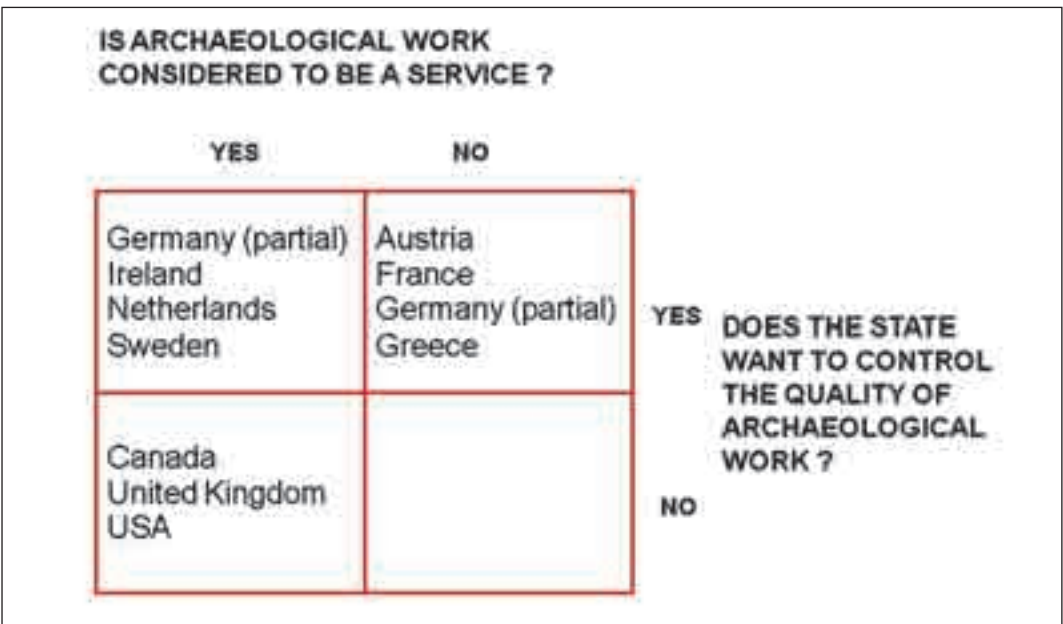


FIG. 1. Diagram showing how the state consider the archaeological work and if the state wish to control the quality of archaeological work

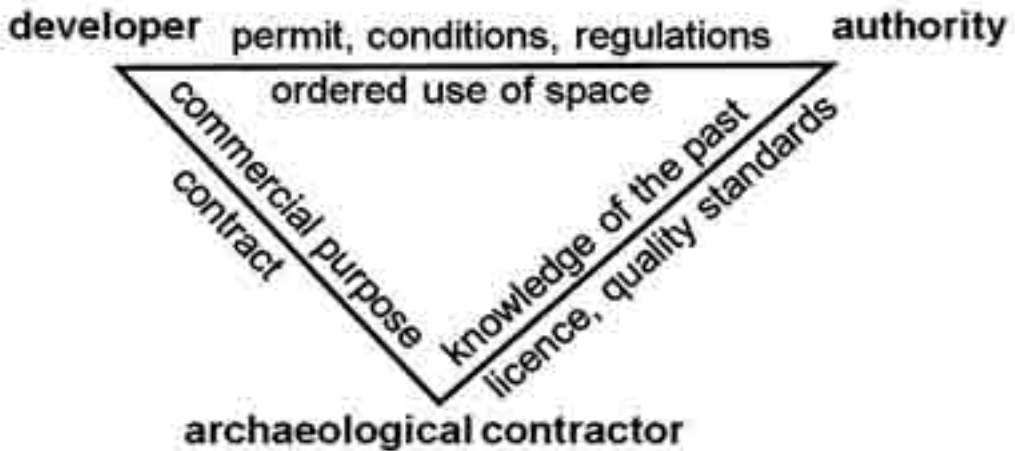


FIG. 2. The triangular relationship that exists between the authority, the developer of plans, and the archaeological contractor

other. However, this is only one aspect. It is accepted that archaeological work may be a service, but it is also acknowledged that its result is important for the understanding and appreciation of the national archaeological heritage. Therefore, 'market principles' can only operate when the quality of the work is ascertained. Otherwise, there is too big a risk that commercial and financial considerations will prevail. Therefore, a free market system was introduced *in combination with* a system of quality assurance which is based on the law.

This is illustrated by Fig. 2, which shows the triangular relationship that exists between the authority, which can be a local or national government, the developer of plans, and the archaeological contractor. The upper line of the triangle gives the relation between the competent authority

and the developer: their relation takes the form of a permit, or usually a whole series of permits, which the developer needs to realise his plans. The main issue here, indicated inside the triangle, is the ordered use of space and control of the impact of the proposed development.

The right part of the triangle gives the relation between the competent authority and the contractor. The main issue in this case, is the way in which we acquire knowledge about the past. Archaeological sites are an important source of information about our past and it is also a fragile resource which makes it a government's responsibility to ascertain that it is properly handled. In the Dutch view, this cannot be guaranteed by the mechanisms on the left part of the triangle: the issue there, is time and money: when the developer has the

right permit, he becomes a principal to the archaeological contractor and their relationship takes the form of a contract by which the principal seeks to ascertain that the work is being done as economically as possible and within a specified period of time. That, and nothing else, is the product which the developer wants from the contractor. The government, however, wants the contractor to produce something very different, namely relevant knowledge about the past and for that reason the government needs its own control in the process, which is a licence, requiring, among others, work under quality standards.

Comparable systems are in use in other European countries, although explicit archaeological standards are only one way in which the State controls quality.<sup>3</sup> In Germany and Sweden, for example, this is done by control of the market: the state selects the company that will do the work.

Government concern for quality is the essential difference with Anglosaxon countries where – in principle – the right part of the triangle is lacking. There are exceptions, and I know I am simplifying matters, but here only the upper and the left part of the relationship exists: what is being done about archaeology is largely determined by the conditions imposed by the authority on the developer and, second, by what that developer, in his role as principal, agrees with the contractor. There are no legal pro-

visions covering the relationship on the right. This does not imply, of course, that archaeological contractors in the UK or the USA do not have standards. They do, but these have no legal foundation so the basis of the system remains that most archaeological work is being done without an enforceable mechanism for control by the government and much depends on the contract between developer and contractor.

The French system is in fact just the opposite. Again I stress that my model is a simplification, but in principle it is the left part of the triangle which is lacking there. The French law has an archaeology tax, which is imposed on developers as compensation for the damage inflicted on the national heritage and which is used to pay for archaeological work. In France, it is the government that determines what the developer should pay and what he should comply with before the development can take place, and it is also the government that controls the archaeological work. This is being done by a public administrative institution called *l'Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives* (INRAP), and although there are in reality contractual arrangements with the developer most archaeological work is a state monopoly.<sup>4</sup>

This system does not have explicit standards and provides guarantees for the quality of the work being done because

that is ascertained by INRAP. Moreover, there is no direct connection between the tax yield from any given development and the amount that INRAP will in practice spend on the excavation. From an archaeological point of view, this is a very good mechanism to ensure that money is being spent where it is needed most. On the other hand, there is obviously some contradiction here with the way in which the developer pay principle in the Convention was intended: elsewhere, a development might simply become too expensive and be relocated because of archaeology. In the French system, that would require other mechanisms.

This kind of comparison illustrates what the strengths and weaknesses can be. In the Dutch type of system, for example, the archaeological contractor can get in a very difficult position, because that contractor always has to serve two masters. In the Anglosaxon type of system, there is inadequate government control over the quality of archaeological work and a strong risk that financial considerations will prevail. And in the French type of system, there is no market competition with a drive for innovation, there is the risk of an inefficient bureaucracy, and there is an assumption that if the work is being done by a semi-governmental organisation, it is done well.

Of course each system also has its advantages, and I would like to stress that

none of these systems is necessarily superior. Much depends on the way in which archaeological heritage management in a given national context actually works in practice. It matters, of course, if archaeology is seen as a public task or if this can be shared with, or even left to the private sector. And it also matters if the state wants to control the quality of what is done. However, while the merits of these approaches can be discussed, the choice is usually not up to archaeologists. Archaeology as an academic discipline strives to achieve the best results in acquiring knowledge about the past. This is the dominant perspective of archaeologists and, in theory at least, of the administrations and politicians that make the rules. The immediate goal for archaeologists is to achieve an academically relevant result, but the ultimate goal for both parties is to obtain meaningful knowledge about the past for the benefit of society as a whole. In this respect, the National Heritage Board of Sweden has recently adopted the following official policy statement for archaeology that is the most far reaching that I have encountered so far:

“The academic research result is no longer the aim but the means. The aim shall be to convert and communicate the investigation results in an interesting and relevant way for different target groups.”<sup>5</sup>

This shows that there are quite different

perspectives on the role of academic research in archaeology today and I would like to explore this further. We should realize that there are in fact several different dimensions to this. Archaeology is particular in that it does not belong to one but to several domains of science at the same time. In Europe where archaeology was more or less invented, we tend to count it among the humanities and we see it as part of history or even art history. In most of the rest of the world, however, archaeology is seen primarily as a social science that is about understanding human behavior and social evolution and in universities around the world it is taught mostly in departments of archaeology and anthropology. Finally, there is a branch that is called science-based archaeology and that is in the realm of the natural sciences. It includes both hard science, such as physics, chemistry or geology, as well as life sciences such as palaeobotany and archaeozoology. So archaeology belongs simultaneously in three of the major domains of science. This is often forgotten, and while there are many other fields that are highly interdisciplinary, archaeology is in fact more or less unique in that it really belongs in three different domains. In a recent report, the Royal Academy of Sciences in the Netherlands has advised Dutch universities and the government to create or to keep an independent position for academic archaeology and not

subsume it under humanities, and to provide it with Beta and not with Alpha budgets because of its fieldwork and laboratory needs.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from this rather unique disciplinary position, there is the dichotomy between academic archaeology defined as the study of the past and next to that the new branch of archaeology that deals with archaeological resources and that by definition deals with the present and the future. It is normally called cultural resource management or archaeological heritage management or amalgams of this.<sup>7</sup> This is a new field of research that is increasingly taught in specialized master-programs, and at the same time more and more academic or scientific research in this field is being done. It now has a rapidly increasing amount of literature and its own peer-reviewed journals, such as *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* since 1999, *Public Archaeology* since 2000, *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* since 2004, *Heritage management* since 2008, and the newest *The Historic Environment* to be launched in the course of 2009. They illustrate that archaeological resource management has matured as a subdiscipline of archaeology.<sup>8</sup>

It can be argued that the new subdiscipline has been created as a response from academia to the needs of society. The Valletta Convention has in fact created that

Domain	Archaeology as the study of the past	Archaeology as the study of the role of the past in the present
Humanities	History of the (evolution of) ancient society, (development of) material culture	Provide the story of the past, connect people to the past, provide identity, satisfy curiosity
Social Sciences	Social archaeology, understanding past behavior, gender studies	Local/indigenous stakeholders, administrative and legal policies, ethics, archaeology as profession
Natural Sciences	Archaeometry, dating methods, reconstructing environments, ancient DNA, isotope analysis	Physical preservation <i>in situ</i> , climate change, sea level rise, restoration techniques

FIG. 3. Table showing the relations between academia and the management of heritage resources

need – or perhaps I should say, has shaped it – because the principles behind the convention require much more careful management of archaeological resources than was normal before the 1990’s. In Fig. 3, I have tried to bring the relationship between the various divisions in archaeology into a table that shows the relations between academia and the management of heritage resources. The three domains of science are here, as well as the orientations towards the past and the present, and I have indicated some examples the sort of things that archaeology does.

At the level of the humanities, archaeology studies the evolution of human society and the development of its material culture, and by doing so it provides for a need of society by providing information and understanding of the past, it may serve to create identity, to connect people to their past, or more simply: to just satisfy people’s curiosity. By doing all of that, academic archaeology in fact provides justification for the costs that society incurs by properly managing its archaeological heritage. This is not only true at the level of society, it is also true at the level of indi-



vidual sites or landscapes that need to be understood before they can be properly managed, protected and sometimes conserved or restored.

At the next level, that of the social sciences, research of ancient civilizations and past societies provides a better understanding of past behavior and broadens and deepens the story of the past. Studying the past through its material remains only, leads to rather naïve nations about the way in which human society works and evolves over time, and we cannot do without critical social and anthropological theory. But there are other types of research at this level, because apart from convincing society that it is important and worthwhile to properly manage the past, social research is needed to investigate how best to do this because we are dealing with people. For example, outside Europe, in post-colonial countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia and so on, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century archaeologists have become aware that when dealing with archaeological resources they were dealing with the heritage of native populations and those populations could no longer be ignored as important stakeholders. They must be empowered, get a say in things and participate in the decisions taken. In my opinion, such changes have decisively influenced attitudes in Europe. After all, even though we are mostly dealing with our own heritage here, as descendant communities, dealing with the

local population requires the same change of attitude. We cannot as archaeologists just go out into the countryside or a town quarter, do our thing and move out again to our ivory tower, without involving the local population. Besides that, given the way decision processes are structured nowadays, good stakeholder management is essential if you want to get anything done about protection or continued survival of sites. And believe it or not: all this requires research if you want to do it properly and successfully. The same goes for development of heritage policy, for communication with diverse audiences and last but not least, for developing further the ethical dimensions of archaeology. All these things more or less belong to the realm of what we call public archaeology nowadays, though defining that concept is a challenge by itself.

Finally, at the bottom level, we are dealing with 'science-based archaeology'. Of course everybody is aware of the immense contribution archaeometry can make to our study of the past, be it by the understanding of stratigraphy that we learned from geology, or all sorts of dating methods from C14 to dendrochronology, or the new dimensions that archaeology is acquiring right now by isotope analysis and the study of ancient DNA. Some of these are also useful for managing archaeological resources, for example fast and reliable dating methods that can be an



invaluable help to determine what we are dealing with and what actions to take when chance discoveries are made. A different dimension is provided by the results of archaeological work that can be directly useful to present-day problems, for example by providing time-depth to studies into climate change, aspects of sustainability or when engineers are trying to come to grips with the possible effects of sea-level rise and what to do about it.

There is a third aspect as well. Especially over the last decade, an increasing amount of attention has been going to research that is intended to provide data for the *in situ* preservation of archaeological resources. In my opinion, assuming that preservation *in situ* is the best option, is a largely unproven and mostly untested hypothesis. Why should we believe that in the polluted and rapidly changing world of today, archaeological resources are better off when we leave them where they are? So the recent increase in archaeometrical research is a welcome and necessary development that is being promoted nowadays to investigate what happens with archaeological materials in the soil, and what conditions have what effects, so that at least the hypothesis can be tested.<sup>9</sup>

This is a good development, but at the same time we must realize that the physical conditions are just one aspect. Very often now, the obligations from the Valletta Con-

vention lead to unacceptable policies whereby important sites are for example being parceled out and built over “to be preserved for future research.” Government agencies are blindly letting it happen or appear to do so, or indeed encourage to let important archaeological sites go down the drain under the pretext of preservation *in situ*. It is also a great way for developers to save money. Mostly, nobody has any idea what will happen to the buried resource, and what the effects of the works on site will be, and nobody seems to care that the so-called preserved site *in situ* will never be accessible again for research. So instead of going all the way to try and excavate a site with good research prospects completely, we allow developers to save money by destroying a site indirectly, after perhaps many years, instead of direct. Just to make sure, I am not advocating here that from now on we do not preserve *in situ* any more, but we need to abandon the dogma because *as a dogma* it does not serve the interests of archaeology.

At the same time, it is really infuriating to see that archaeologists are often put to work in great numbers by colleagues that work as curators for the government, on sites of dubious research value that an academic would not touch for lack of worthwhile research questions. Of course this type of work may generate new and unexpected discoveries and strategies to optimize the

likelihood of such discoveries are employed in several countries, such as Ireland or the German state of Sachsen-Anhalt. But elsewhere archaeology has also become an industry that needs projects to perpetuate itself, especially in fully commercialized systems of heritage management.

On the other hand, it is also true that even large programs of planned research excavations are not always very useful. We all know many projects that have never been fully published. There is no excuse for this, but still museums are full of unpublished research excavations. In several countries, at least the preventive excavations all get published nowadays; in the Netherlands the term for this is now a maximum of 2 years. Of course a published preventive excavation is far more valuable than an unpublished research excavation. And nobody should be allowed to keep his or her rights to an excavation for more than a few years: the worst crime in archaeology is the old professor sitting on his unpublished research excavation for many years and not allowing someone else to publish it.

Irrespective of what system of heritage management we all work in, commercialized or not, it is true that almost all archaeology is contract work by now. I don't think archaeology suffers from this too much: it only suffers in countries where the state exercises no control, and even in that situation there are at least as many advantages than there are disadvantages: better funding, faster publication, more unexpected discoveries that inspire new research. The only issue that I see that is very important in many countries that have commercial archaeology, is that archaeologists must take great care to not allow the divide between academic research and the heritage resource industry – that to some extent is unavoidable – to become an insurmountable obstacle in working together. Fortunately, I know of many countries in Europe (Ireland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain) with policies or grant programs or other incentives that are designed with an eye to maintaining unity inside the profession. I hope and believe we will succeed in that.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. O'Keefe 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe 1987, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview, see Willems, van den Dries 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Recent changes in the law have further reduced this monopoly to field evaluations. In practice, however, INRAP is still responsible for almost all excavation work.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from a presentation by Agneta Lagerlöf (*Riksantikvarieämbetet* Sweden) at the European Association of Archaeologists meeting at Malta on 19 September 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Hunter and Ralston 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See also the review section of the *European Journal of Archaeology* 7 (3), 2004.

<sup>9</sup> There is even a separate conference where the results are discussed. This is the PARIS-meeting, PARIS being a neat acronym that stands for Preserving Archaeological Remains *In Situ*. For a recent publication, see Kars and Van Heeringen 2008.

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