

Diversity in the Past, Diversity in the Present? Issues of Gender, Whiteness, and Class in Classical Archaeology

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“Of the many rights and privileges fought for and won by women in the last century, the right of learning the ancient languages has received the least attention from social historians. Yet the struggle was, though unspectacular, one of the most significant of them all. For the ancient languages provided a kind of intellectual proving ground, in which women were able to show themselves worthy of a university education.”

Introduction

In this short piece I will introduce and summarize the AIAC-session organized by Lisa Lodwick and myself on diversity, and try to address and contextualize some specific issues, which the discipline of Greek and Roman archaeology currently faces. The quote above, perhaps nowadays deemed as an example of mansplaining but quite groundbreaking for its time, is derived from an article published in *The Classical Journal* 1944 by Frank Pierce Jones who wrote about the role of the Classics in the emancipation of women.¹ As an introduction to this contribution it serves well to illustrate how we have moved forward since, how far back the discussion goes and how intertwined Classics and gender are, but also to point out how specific problems of class, gender, privilege, and academia are intersected, implicit, and inherent features of the study of the ancient world. As the quote explains, by being allowed to learn ancient languages, women could elevate and emancipate themselves, for knowing Greek and Latin is a privilege that belongs to the educated (elite). Regretfully, fast forward to 2018, it seems we have been unable to ‘emancipate’ the study of the ancient world itself. Women and other historically marginalized groups gained access to Classical Archaeology below a glass ceiling, as we never shed the inherited historical class-gap, colonial ties, gender imbalance and a lack of diversity that existed from the birth of the field. These issues and the absence of explicit decolonization of the discipline affects the field in all its forms: teaching, research, conferences, publication. I fear that a continued lack of self-consciousness on issues of class, race, and gender and the long legacy of exclusion inherent to the Classics, will eventually make the field of study I love so much redundant, while it has so much potential to make a difference.

In the context of these persisting issues, it is not hard to imagine how worrying it was for many to see an all-male keynote panel appear at AIAC, and how badly it reflected on the discipline that already suffers so much from the stigma of being predominantly male and white. Putting forward an all-male panel very much sustained the idea of Classical

Archaeology as a conservative ivory tower of privilege, something which will make it difficult to attract engaged and diverse students who would be able to change it. Even worse, the privilege of the white male that resonated from the panel finds reflection with an increasing number of far right, white supremacist, and antifeminist movements that are using a narrow view on ancient history as justification for their ideas.² In the five years that have passed since the last AIAC a lot has happened, both in the world outside and in the scientific community. The worlds having moved closer together due to the changing political climate and a growth in awareness of inclusiveness on multiple levels in academia and beyond. Also, the resistance of the denomination 'Classical' became louder again, as we witnessed the already mentioned increase and highly problematic misuse of the past amplified by social media. The pro-activeness and care witnessed in the wider community of Greek and Roman archaeology after the all-male panel however, gives cause for hope. The panel was a lamentable incident, but it was able to bring forward a large group of engaged scholars that want to actively change notions of class, whiteness, and gender and dismantle the excesses of alt-right appropriation. Online and during the session, a feeling of empowerment prevailed. If we could change a keynote panel together, if we could organize a constructive dialogue, we can also take this next step together towards a more self-reflexive, diverse, and inclusive future for Greco-Roman archaeology. Changing the discipline to an inclusive field of study means an investment of energy, a radical rethinking of this profession, and accepting different units of analysis and different ontologies outside the western tradition: these all start with more awareness of existing implicit biases and it ends with rooting out its central problems. The curse of the canon is strong, and requires that we cannot just passively watch it unfold: it is time to act.

Initiative

After unprecedented online commotion, an extra session was added to the AIAC 2018 conference, a new session but not at all a novel subject: diversity issues in Classical Archaeology.³ The concerns of all-male keynote panel combined with a scientific committee consisting solely of tenured and emeritus male professors were voiced abundantly and stridently on Twitter, Facebook or by emails directed to the organization in Bonn/Cologne.⁴ Both the widely shared collective anger, the reactions within the community, and the immediate response of the organizing committee in Bonn/Cologne to fix the gender imbalance in the keynotes and help organize the session, showed readiness and was cause for optimism. The gender imbalance at the keynote was illustrative of a field that has to come to terms with much more than a gender issue, but with a structural problem in the discipline. Lisa Lodwick and I therefore wanted to organize this session not only to address gender imbalance, but to take it as an opportunity to constructively reflect and confront ourselves with pressing current and

persistent issues. I think the session proved to be successful in this confrontation on multiple levels, but before moving towards this I first want to personally reflect on the context of the problem, how Classical Archaeology sets itself apart from other disciplines such as Prehistory, Anthropology or Classics and how that affects the approach towards solutions.

Diversity in the Past, Diversity in the Present?

Classical archaeology needs a different approach independent from Classics and from Archaeology in general on both a practical and ideological level. Classical Archaeology takes on board the problems of both fields, but has no explicit tailor-made structure or platform to address these issues or accommodate solutions. All fields mentioned suffer from pervasive Eurocentric and colonial biases of western traditional scholarship. From Classics the discipline moreover inherited the already mentioned elitist frame based on the idea of the Greco-Roman past as the roots of “Western civilization” excluding people from less privileged backgrounds.⁵ From archaeology it inherited further colonial problems of fieldwork and the ownership of the material remains of the past.⁶ The consequences of Classical Archaeology falling in between these two fields meant that all the attempts that have been made to make the discipline more progressive happened in the margins, not in the core of the field. Discussions on equity and diversity are being held at different venues and Classical Archaeology seems to fall right in between the cracks. Practically therefore, Greco-Roman archaeology is in imminent need of space to explicitly address its own issues in addition to other movements and initiatives in Anthropological Archaeology and in Classics.⁷ Another consequence is that there is a general lack of studies that incorporate theoretical feminist critique in Classical Archaeology when compared to other fields such as Classics, Ancient History and Anthropological Archaeology.⁸ Feminist, queer, and indigenous archaeological theories are of vital importance not just to highlight diverse gendered spaces or practices in antiquity, they are important because they are able to help us move away from the western dominant view of the past, and to better understand ideologies and identities of ancient Rome and Greece.⁹ It should therefore become structurally implemented into a decolonial scholarship of Greco-Roman archaeology.¹⁰ Besides this, rethinking scholarship through these critical theories had another effect that seems currently lacking in Classical Archaeology, the consequences whereof were witnessed at AIAC. Engaging with such theories in other fields helped turn the gaze inward with as Bardolph says: “toward self-reflection about how gender bias and a lack of diversity have affected the work that archaeologists produce.”¹¹

Classical archaeology deals with a legacy that we have not only failed to eliminate, we have not even reflected on it properly yet. Whereas the more self-reflective and

therefore increasingly progressive approach within the field of Classics (although it has a long way to go) has had an impact on its diversity in terms of gender, race, and class representation, falling between the cracks means that Classical archaeology (perhaps with the exception of the subfields of Mediterranean landscape archaeology) runs behind at self-reflexive postcolonial efforts to the discipline.¹² Although postcolonial approaches are not lacking, they are mainly aimed at how to better interpret the past taking into account indigenous perspectives and agencies, and rarely at how to decolonize the practice of archaeology itself. And in this context there is some irony to be found discussing archaeology's role in the broader field of Greek and Roman history and matters of diversity. For decades, a very significant part of the discipline was focused on finding diversity in the past: archaeology as an independent field of study has in a sense been founded on this very idea. It set out to counter history and the classic narratives: archaeology claimed to go beyond the 'big white men' and add the voiceless, the invisible people without history: the women and children, the poor, the slaves, the rural, the non-Romans and non-Greeks to the complexity of the past. Did we go far enough with this premise? With the current increasing appropriations of white supremacist groups archaeology has to push further than just academia to show the different sides and complexity of the past. We have to constantly oppose these misappropriations of the past; and in this age with an increasing influence by social media we have to raise our voices more loudly than ever. We might not have directly nurtured the ideas, but we need to reflect, as the Classics and Social Justice Group put it: on "how we ourselves have presented the field so as to render such (mis)appropriations possible" and we need to discuss what we can do about it.¹³ Archaeology is well equipped to respond and show that what these groups adopted is far removed from how the people in the 'Classical' world lived like and looked like. That it was more multicultural, multilingual and multiracial. To give nuance to current alt-right constructs of minorities or slavery in antiquity, those people that archaeology set out to give a 'voice' need to be heard louder and a critical position and understanding of the dark side of classical antiquity should resonate in- and outside the conference and class rooms.

Postcolonial critique in archaeology that tried to bring the diversity of the ancient past into the foreground did not make the discipline itself a more diverse place. Subtle and less subtle forms of sexism, gender, class and racial inequality impacts both the daily-lived experience of students and scholars and the chances of a successful career and future. We see that still today, as people try to move forward in the field, archaeology becomes increasingly narrowly white and male. Sexual harassment still occurs on a wide scale as well, both in the field as well as at the university.¹⁴ The session's contributions and its discussion addressed a problem that is systemic and affects our whole field and how it is perceived by others, and this in turn affects significantly the future relevance of it. And we need to solve this together, not just women or groups in any way considered a minority. We have

inherited an unequal system, but even if we are not to blame for creating it, by not caring and changing it we are maintaining it, perpetuating it, and for this I believe we are all responsible.

The Session

This brings us to the session, which was successful in terms of the turnout and attended by a diverse international group of scholars, included valuable contributions and a lively and constructive debate. The opening by organizers Lisa Lodwick and myself consisted of the presentation of an introduction and a statistical analysis provided by Lisa that grounded the discussion on the gender gap in AIAC and other conferences as well as in matters of publication in Greco-Roman archaeology. Birgitta Hoffmann gave a detailed personal insight in existing gender imbalances in Roman army studies. Ingrid Berg provided a powerful statement on inequity in Swedish archaeology and how archaeology functioned as a culturally situated practice, imbued with 19th century values on race, gender and class (one man left the room after she addressed sexual abuse and power). Naoise Mac Sweeney situated the debate within in current academic and political rhetoric and made a valuable analysis of the contexts of different issues and their subsequent implications for gender and racial diversity in the discipline. Matthew Mandich discussed issues of whiteness in teaching Classical archaeology and the initiative he took with 'International Society for Archaeology, Art and Architecture of Rome' to actively increase diversity in archaeological fieldwork.

The discussion that followed had to bring together an international group of scholars from different backgrounds, experiences and with different viewpoints, making it a challenging yet open and powerful debate. The proof that it does matter to be present in sessions like these at large international conferences are the several people who approached us afterwards stating that they never experienced a meeting like this before and felt really empowered by it. Some session attendees, mainly derived from American universities or junior scholars, were quite experienced in talking, thinking about, and taking care of matters of social injustice. Other people were less aware of the issues due to their background and position, but no one was unwilling to listen and it was great to have gathered a diverse crowd. We did not just 'preach to the converted'. With such a diverse group the main point of the discussion was about the existence of the unconscious biases marked by racial, gender and economic inequality and how to generate broader awareness of these. Particular issues that were addressed within this context were manifold: problems of gender and harassment, exclusion from fieldwork because people were women, disabled, or even vegetarians, and the increasing gender gap when one moves up in a career. The overwhelming whiteness of the discipline and the issue of intersectionality were

addressed very cogently by a female panel member of color who recalled that as a Classical archaeologist she is almost always the only black person at international conferences in Classical Archaeology. Race, class, and gender are overlapping social classifications and how intersectionality causes particular disadvantages within the field should be more strongly addressed.¹⁵

Afterthoughts: from Diversity to Social Justice

In relation to the AIAC- conference I think I want to stipulate after summarizing the discussion that diversity is *not* the solution – the field needs to diversify, but this is only the first step: inclusion, decolonization, equity, and social justice is the solution. It is incredibly easy to install diversity. Change at least half of the scientific committee of the AIAC into female scholars, non-white scholars, scholars from a non-western background and early career scholars. This will significantly change the way this conference will run in the future. A bottom-up minor change that will allow multiple views on how an international conference on Classical archaeology should move forward. However as I said, making the AIAC-committee a more diverse body of people is just one very tiny easy step. Inclusivity, intersectionality and social justice are about how to allow unjustifiably marginalized and excluded people in this community to structurally become part of it. That means much more than a seat on a committee or addressing a keynote lecture. It stretches far beyond the organization of a conference but includes changing the culture in which research and teaching develops: it does not help to add women, LGBT-people, African Americans, Hispanic, Asian or Southern Europeans to a committee when the field itself does not rule out inequity. Inclusive means that people do not feel marginalized: it means they do not think that Classical archaeology is not for “them” because they are Asian or Black or Muslim, that people do not think they cannot do archaeology because they have a physical disability: inclusive and social justice means that young scholars do not have to skip important conferences because they have babies at home. Eliminating inequity, enabling egalitarian relationships, promoting inclusiveness and establishing environments that are supportive of all people who want to engage with the past should be the ultimate goal. And this is vital for all of us because with more inclusion the field will significantly improve to a more critical, more rigorous, more creative, and more complex study of the past.¹⁶

No one needs to be convinced about how great our profession can be. How passionate we carry it out on the good days. That the data we collect and analyze and the knowledge we reflect upon is worthwhile. The ‘Classical’ in archaeology refers directly to the root of the problem of exclusion and the colonial heritage of the discipline. The term as a form of critical historical scholarship and reception study can teach us a valuable lessons on how pasts can be reconstructed, adopted, re-appropriated, and abused and warns us

to be mindful about its ideological usage. But what makes Mediterranean archaeology important as a term to actually use is that it is not classical. Greek and Roman cultures do not reflect the whitewashed, elite, male society that Winckelmann created and nationalists perpetuated ever since, and we should make it our joint effort to oppose this: in our classrooms, research projects, conferences, and in public outreach. To attract people with different views on the past to make this discipline valuable, relevant and innovative. The deeply imperialist roots and Eurocentric canon are maintained if we do not consciously change. We cannot solve this today or tomorrow, but we can also not consider the debate ended or the problem dealt with after a session at AIAC.

One evening during the conference, more than a thousand AIAC-participants were brought together in the cathedral of Cologne that through its space and music created a short but powerful moment of communion. The architectural construction, so it was told before the organs started to play, lasted from 1248 to 1473 and was combined with a philosophy no longer present in modern society: that its creation was not meant for this-, but for the next generation. What was also mentioned during that brief talk was that the construction of the Cathedral was never finished and remains work in progress in need of continuous care and attention. Like the Cologne cathedral the issues raised here are a constant work in progress through the spirit of communion, but unlike a gothic cathedral, we need to do this both for this generation and for the next.

Towards the Future: AIAC 2023 Goals

The session organizers Lisa Lodwick and myself and all the participants that were present and contributed to the discussion hope that this session will be the first of a returning debate at AIAC and beyond on how we can decolonize the discipline, how we can become more inclusive and progressive in the 21st century and how by this, we will be able not only to remain relevant but become significant. As the AIAC is a five-year international conference drawing people from all over the world studying the Greco-Roman past, this session can serve as a perfect benchmark to critically observe progress made in the field. As AIAC is the self-proclaimed 'most important platform of exchange for all disciplines that deal with Greco-Roman civilizations', we want to collaborate to set a precedent for a more self-conscious and progressive discipline in a continuous debate.¹⁷ The issues and the step towards solutions on a variety of topics that were discussed during the session would make sense in an ongoing debate, and we were pleased that the AIAC-organizing committee was positive about facilitating this. We call into life hereby, the platform of '**Non-Classical Archaeologists**'. We welcome critical contributions and solutions. We want everyone to feel responsible for this, out of respect, affect and out of love for a profession that will lose all its significance if it does not change. And we were with 1235 people at AIAC, small enough to act and large enough to make a substantial difference.

The Platform of Non-Classical Archaeologists Initial Aims

- Provide a broader forum for the discussion of the multifaceted dimensions of social injustice that exists in the discipline of Greek and Roman Archaeology and create a network of engaged scholars
- Change of the scientific committee of AIAC to an equal amount of male, female and non-binary scholars, non-western scholars and young career scholars and ensure a mixed diversity of speakers across all academic panels and the keynotes
- Create awareness of the multiple existing biases in the discipline and discuss ways to disseminate awareness and discuss ways to solve them
- Find creative and collaborative solutions to foster involvement, inclusivity, and equity in the discipline in both fieldwork, teaching, publication, outreach, hiring, conferences, graduate programs, and grants for people from historically marginalized groups intrinsically excluded by the discipline based on their gender, age, race, sexual orientation, nationality, education and mental or physical ability.
- Raise issues of gender-, race-, and class based-harassment, discrimination and power abuse in Greek and Roman archaeological fieldwork and academia and support the groups that do already do this.
- Use the network to guard a ‘best practices’ approach to make sure all conferences in Greek and Roman archaeology are inclusive events.
- Encourage and support public outreach by scholars addressing and battling the current issues of using the ancient world for white supremacist, far right or antifeminist rhetoric.
- Ally with currently existing groups related to the field of Greek and Roman Archaeology that already started initiatives to decolonize the discipline such as for instance COSWA, The Black Trowel Collective, the Women’s Classical Committee and the Classic and Social Justice groups.
- Encourage initiatives in reforming a curriculum and reading in the teaching of Greco-Roman Archaeology.

Notes

¹ Jones 1944, 326.

² In terms of Manopsheres, see Zuckenberg 2018.

³ Besides facebook and twitter, open letters were published by Mol 2018 and Raja 2018.

⁴ Website AIAC ><http://www.aiac2018.de/><.

⁵ See Quinn 2017.

⁶ See for instance Panich 2013. Discussion on colonialism and postcolonial critique are present in Greco-Roman archaeology. See Van Dommelen 1997, 305–23. Fieldwork related concerns that are discussed for archaeology and anthropological archaeology but rarely addressed specifically for Classical Archaeology

are raised for instance by Gero 1994; Surface-Evans – Jackson 2012; Monroe et al. 2008, 215–233 or Tomášková 2007, 264–280. An exception to this is Scott 1998.

⁷ The SCS has a Classics and social justice group, the SAA see Rizvi 2008, Looking Forward, Looking Back: A Special Issue from the Committee on the Status of Women in Archaeology (COSWA), SAA record September 20018, 6 f.

⁸ As Cullen argues in her review on the contribution of feminism in Archaeology that the focus of most is anthropological archaeology, and the majority of authors would identify themselves as anthropologists. Contributors to *Women in Ancient Societies* include social and legal historians, classicists, art historians, and philosophers, with one paper by a classical archaeologist. Cullen 1996, 409.

⁹ As argued by Barnett. Barnett 2012, 22. For examples of important archaeological works concerning feminist or indigenous critique of scholarship and archaeology see for instance Battle-Baptiste 2011, Smith 2005.

¹⁰ See note 12 for a brief overview of decolonization within disciplinary practices.

¹¹ Bardolph 2014, 522.

¹² Post-colonial archaeology in this respect is most prevalent in Mediterranean Landscape studies, as well as in the limes research tradition within the archaeology of Roman Britain or North Africa for instance. See for instance Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018, 283–302 for Roman Britain, and the aforementioned publication of Van Dommelen 1994 for postcolonial Mediterranean archaeology. In Classics again, more self-reflexive work has been undertaken on decolonizing the discipline itself, see for instance Vasunia's forthcoming book on *Empire without End: Postcolonialism and the Ancient World* (2019) within the New directions in Classics Series. The most self-reflective, explicit and widespread attempts of decolonization however in this respect are derived from the field of Anthropological Archaeology. Such approaches are aimed both at social dimensions of practicing fieldwork and scholarly interpretation within indigenous archaeology and heritage, as well as (turned inwards) criticizing inequities inherent in colonial practices in the field and discipline itself. For an overview see Bruchac 2014; Atalay 2006; Warburton 2002 or Rizvi 2016 (amongst others).

¹³ Classics and Social Justice group statement see ><https://classicssocialjustice.wordpress.com/home/><

¹⁴ See EAA Barcelona session on sexual harassment, Tromso session on #metoo. Blouin 2017, on why the glass ceiling is white.

¹⁵ The absence of this discussion is mainly due to the problematic homogenous racial make-up of the field. For intersectionality in academia see Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012.

¹⁶ Wylie 2010, 241.

¹⁷ See AIAC Website ><http://www.aiac2018.de/><

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