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# Beyond Ethics: Considerations in Problematizing Community Involvement and Outreach in Archaeological Practice

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## Background and Introduction

It is important sometimes to break away from traditional methods of scientific and archaeological writing to consider the broader social implications of our research activities. This paper is an attempt to do so by considering not the ancient subjects of our investigations, but rather the living participants of communities in which we labour. In so doing, many of the details of usual concern—site names, dates and periods, precise locations, artefacts, footnotes, and scholarly references—are not particularly important. Rather, what is of significance in considering the ethics (and beyond) of doing fieldwork are the relationships that we forge within the contexts of our scientific teams, local communities, and the broader public. This paper will focus on the second of these three contexts, namely the local community in which we work. In order to protect the identities

of all involved, many of the details of our work have been edited; in any case they were secondary to our main thesis: that archaeological ethics are flexible rules, negotiated as part of daily practice, and largely dependent upon the context in which conflict and resolution reside.

The setting for our present archaeological project is a village in the economically poor region of southeastern Turkey. In the 1980s, the Turkish government announced formal plans to build several dozen hydroelectric dams on major rivers and their tributaries in the southeast in order to provide electricity and irrigation water to the region. Archaeologists and other specialists from across the globe were invited to study the threatened archaeological sites of the region in a broad gesture of scientific collaboration. During a preliminary survey, our site stood out in terms of its size, its duration of human occupation, and its promise as a key location for understanding the early history of urbanization in the region. We initiated fieldwork in the mid-1990s at the tell and continue to bring an international and multidisciplinary team of scholars each summer. The dam which will partially inundate our site is scheduled for completion in 2014, although the completion of the project has been delayed many times already.

The ancient site is located near a modern village with an official population of approximately 10,000. During the summer months, our collaborative team from four universities in the US, Europe, and Turkey, spends two months working at the site, hiring around sixty local villagers to assist in the excavations. The villagers provide much of the manual labour; almost all are male and over 16 years old. Working with our team gives them an opportunity to participate in, and thereby observe, the process of scientific archaeology in action. Part of our success emerges from the diverse cultural backgrounds and different professional interests of the participating archaeologists. This paper, however, focuses on another aspect of the collaboration, namely the relationship between the foreign archaeologists and the local villagers. To do so, we take an anthropological approach in examining our attempts at community involvement and outreach by presenting three stories which we believe allow for a

reflexive evaluation of our successes and failures. In other words, we are concerned here with how science is done, not with the results of the scientific undertaking. This paper is not meant to be a programmatic statement on the ways ethical archaeology should be practiced but rather a small contribution exemplifying that ethics are both a daily practice and a dialogue between individuals.

Before discussing these anecdotes, some context about the working relationship between the archaeological team and our direct overseers, the regional archaeological museum, is needed. In very general terms, when conducting our fieldwork the scientific staff closely follows both the legal and ethical expectations of the Turkish government and the regional archaeological museum under whose auspices we work. Our staff abides by the extensive guidelines and rules implemented by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and respects what is asked of the team in terms of community outreach by the museum. Naturally, the museum's principal concerns are the conservation and archiving of artefacts from the dig, the production of reports on our fieldwork, and the display of finds in its public galleries. Several years ago, as part of a long-term development project which will culminate in a new museum, the museum exhibition halls were closed for inventorying, a necessary process which has had the unfortunate effect of temporarily cutting off public access to the galleries. The current museum building is old, the static displays had not been regularly updated, and the building is poorly located within the modern city, so that it has been an under-utilized resource for some time. The current timetable would have the new museum and cultural centre opening in 2013. The importance of this observation is to show that, albeit unevenly, there is a genuine interest on the part of some Turkish authorities to practice public outreach, although the administrative and financial hurdles they face are considerable.

Navigating the proscriptions set out by the museum significantly informs how we proceed in the field and certainly influences our approaches to community interaction. Another paper could be devoted entirely to this nested level of community involvement. However, as noted

above, this article concentrates upon our experiences with the local villagers, and presents three stories relating events that took place within discrete contexts: (1) the ancient site itself; (2) the dig house where the team members live and work during the excavation season; (3) and the village where the workers and their families live. These stories illustrate some of the ethical issues which archaeologists involved in the project face and inform our perceptions about the reality of doing archaeological outreach.

## Accessibility to the Site

Our ancient site comprises two parts: a high citadel mound, which accounts for about 10 percent of the ancient city, and a much larger lower town. For the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the citadel mound belongs to the state. By law, as an archaeological site, it is public land. The lower town, a low flat area surrounding the citadel on three sides, however, is owned privately and farmed. Wheat has been grown here for centuries; in the past decade cotton farming has become common in the lower town with the use of modern irrigation techniques. In theory, the government could carry out a procedure to seize the privately-owned part of the site and then compensate the landowners at a fractional value. But, there has been no will to do this on the part of the government since this part of the ancient site will be flooded by the lake to be created behind the dam, and thus it can not be preserved and developed as a future tourist site. Above all, it would create enormous resentment within the village.

Access to the archaeological site is not a straight forward matter. It is not at all off-limits to locals but its access is restricted. During the excavation season, anyone can go on the mound as they please as long as they do not enter the formal excavation areas and the government representative who accompanies the team does not mind visitors as long as they do not interrupt work. There is no policy that makes visitors unwelcome. The visitors that do come to the mound do not usually attempt to go into the excavations. In fact, following recently implemented rules requiring that safety fences be erected around the active excavation areas, most visitors

treat the fence as a real barrier and respect the limits of access. There are very few locals who appear during our working hours. This is in part because the archaeologists excavate when people are at work, or when they would rather stay at home in the shade during the intense summer heat. Our most frequent visitors are children who visit the high mound during the season in the mornings to pick the *kember* berries which ripen in July and August.

Once the season has ended and the archaeologists have left, community members visit the site for picnics, children assuredly go there for horseplay, and locals also frequent the mound for pilgrimages to a small shrine and cemetery located on the citadel mound. During the off-season, people who come on top of the mound can and will go in and out of the trenches, make campfires, and throw away picnic refuse. In other words, access is much more limited when the archaeological team is present. When the excavation team is not present, the regional museum, local *jandarma* and a site guard hired by the archaeologists keep a watchful eye for looters. An important and respected sheikh is buried on top of the mound and his *türbe* or tomb is venerated in the village and quite often visited. In the town, whether one is religious or not, this man is respected as an important and pious leader. People seemed to have forgotten when exactly he lived but trace his actions back to their great-grandfather's generation. His sister is also a respected figure in the village and her tomb is located on another mound near the village. The top of the mound is also still being used as one of the town's cemeteries. One of the excavation areas is adjacent to the cemetery and our workers take their breaks and have breakfast among the tombs.

Early in a recent season, a member of an important family within the community passed away. Following a long tradition, the family decided to bury their recently deceased one in the cemetery on top of the mound. This created an ethical dilemma since, from the perspective of the scientific team, the mound is, above all, an archaeological site which belongs to the state. It is not legal to have modern burials there, but the balance is delicate since the locals see the top of the mound as their traditional

burial ground. The burial process, which takes place rapidly by local custom, was temporarily halted as the project's scientific director, government representative, senior members of the deceased's family, museum director, local *jandarma*, and town imam discussed the situation. The ethical issues were complex. While all could appreciate the importance of local custom and the wishes of the bereaved, the law also needed to be upheld and the state's property protected. Local power issues and emotions of grief further intensified the encounter. In the end, a compromise was reached and the scientific director was asked to decide whether or not the burial would significantly harm the ancient site. As outsiders, it seemed ethical to our team to allow the funeral to take place and not to stop the villagers, who are our hosts, colleagues, and friends, from burying their dead in their traditional cemetery. The area affected, approximately two metres squared, represents less than 0.00001 percent of the site's surface. A balance between practicality and professionalism, between the obligation to keep the site protected and not wanting to alienate the people without whom the project could not happen, had to be found. The funeral did take place on the mound and over 100 people attended. None of them crossed the security tape surrounding the active excavation areas and no damage was done to the site. As part of this 'gentlemen's agreement' it was decided that the cemetery will not expand horizontally in the future, but rather will infill the empty spaces within the cemetery, where archaeological work is already impossible to undertake.

## The Fenced-Off Laboratory

The members of our archaeological staff stay in a government agricultural office compound on the outskirts of the village adjacent to the ancient mound. The dighouse is a bounded space comprising three separate buildings each with twelve rooms, used as bedrooms, laboratories, kitchen and dining room, and storage facilities by the archaeologists. The compound has its own water supply, regular electricity, and a seldom-used granary facility. The compound is demarcated by a barbed-wire fence erected with concrete pillars typical of state architecture. Public access is not allowed into the dighouse and to enter the compound, one must pass through a locked gate, the only access point, with the approval

of the compound's full-time guard. Across the road stand several multi-family dwellings and spread around the compound's perimeter are the fields of neighbouring farmers which abut the fencing.

All archaeological excavations need to delineate the spaces in which research activities are performed. First of all, archaeologists define boundaries where excavations will occur on the ancient site and as we have previously described, on our site security tape is put up around the operation areas. Visitors understand that they are not to enter the excavation areas. The dighouse itself constitutes the second part of the scientific laboratory. It is an area where pottery is counted and weighed, where objects are conserved, drawn, photographed, and described, and where animal bones, stone tools, and other artefacts are analyzed, among a myriad of other tasks. The barbed wire perimeter fences delineate the space of the laboratory and limit its access while imposing certain accepted behaviors. Our team members often joke about whether the compound fence is to keep village children and animals out or to keep us in.

As the digging drew to a close one year, we began the work of processing sediment samples collected in the field in order to recover carbonized botanical materials for analysis. A flotation tank was set up alongside a small creek that runs just inside the northern edge of the compound. Every afternoon, for about a week, two of our team, both young women, would sieve the flotation samples and lay them out to dry. Every day, young boys from the homes of the farmers nearby would come to the barbed wire fence and observe them. The boys ranged in age, probably from six to twelve, and numbered no more than five. One day, however, instead of watching and engaging in quiet chatter, as was their usual practice, the boys picked up stones and threw them at the two foreign women. One of the rocks hit home and while the injury inflicted by the stone was minimal, the outrage from our team members was not. The young boys did not flee when the two archaeologists reprimanded them for their actions, they simply stared on with impunity.

In over a decade of work in this area, we find such encounters to be rare and atypical. However, this experience brought into stark relief several issues surrounding accessibility and archaeological outreach. Spatially, the project staff is embedded in a landscape, and even more specifically, a place fraught with a history of contested authority. Without any desire to be so, archaeologists are the latest occupants in a secured facility that evokes both a physical and symbolic separation of communities. Accessibility is severely controlled, for both parties. The archaeological staff does not leave the compound except to commute to and from the field site or conduct errands in the village. In fact, travel has even been restricted by the local authorities after dusk in some years due to security concerns. Likewise, only two local women who oversee the housekeeping and pottery washing, and the compound guard, interact with the archaeologists on a regular basis within the facility. All other members of the community, including the young boys, must look in upon us and only guess at our practices in the open spaces and behind closed doors.

To the boys, the team members doing the flotation that day were not located in a privileged space that conferred power. Just the opposite, the barbed-wire fence rendered them powerless to effectively react to their provocations. It is not the ethical duty of archaeologists to be on public display at all times while conducting excavation, but the spatial segregation in this southeastern Turkish village clearly has practical ramifications. The young boys who threw the rocks either did not know or did not respect who we were or what we were doing. In this case, the lack of spatial accessibility promoted an equal lack of accessibility to knowledge and understanding. Stepping back from the emotions of the incident, we can see that despite all our efforts at interacting with the adults of the village, we are failing to win the collaboration of at least some of the local children precisely because we do not invite them to participate, spatially or otherwise, in archaeological practice.

## A Form of Outreach

Outreach, as a mode of local community involvement in archaeological projects, is perhaps best represented on our project by a public presentation

held irregularly at the end of the field season. The archaeological staff hosts this presentation with the aim of providing educational and visual information about the site to the villagers. Part slide show and part lecture, this evening event in the village's public square draws many members of the community. Lawn chairs are set up and families arrive with children in tow to view the hour-long presentation, which is given in Turkish by a senior staff member. With the help of visual aids, he explains the history of the site, the findings from previous excavations, and the work undertaken in the current season. Our staff photographer takes pains to ensure that every local member of the digging team has their picture included at least once in the presentation. In fact, it is probably the candid photos of the local workmen that provides the greatest entertainment to the community and makes the most tangible connection between the scientists and the villagers.

Our presentations demonstrate good faith by sharing information about the site's history and cultural heritage, and also provide spatial access of a kind to people who otherwise do not have the opportunity to personally view the excavations. It is also an important medium for sharing the cultural history of the community and instilling pride about local and regional history in its members. The presentations document local participation, provide factual information, and are intended to give the community a means of ownership (by way of access) to their cultural heritage. They have attracted not only the majority of the village men, but also a few of the women who are allowed a rare evening public appearance. This event, hosted by foreigners, does not appear to fit into the usual categories of evening male entertainment, such as playing *okey* at tea houses and watching football matches at public televisions, and the presence of village women is accepted, if not common. The long-term value of the information provided by the presentations is more difficult to gauge. While the presentations may go a long way toward developing lasting social relationships between the community and archaeologists, it is still unclear whether the scientific information presented in the talks themselves has much lasting impact on the attendees, although it is our intention to promote this knowledge.

Spatially, this event is a successful example of accessibility. The location of the presentation, a public square, is not the key factor in this practice. Instead, it is the interaction between the community and the archaeologists that renders the space public and accessible for this temporal event. However, it helps that the talks are held in a place considered *within* the community. Should the presentations be held on the compound grounds, for example, a different evocative spatial effect would be achieved—not one of sharing space, but of letting people in. The emphasis would be on access to a non-communal space and the power relations involved in that dynamic, as opposed to the intermingling of two corporate groups. This is not to suggest that communal spaces are neutral places, only that on this occasion the public square facilitates a more balanced social relationship between the archaeologists and the community.

## Implications and Conclusions

Accessibility illustrates some of the power relations within the village and its entrenched social hierarchy. A former village mayor was able to build his irrigation pipe over the citadel mound without serious implications but the few clandestine diggers who have been caught looting by the *jandarma* were severely punished. Only important members of certain families in the village are privileged enough to be buried on top of the mound. This reflects the social structure and the power relations between the different kin groups which comprise the modern village; a situation played out in hundreds of other villages across the country. Limitations of access to the ancient site reflect the tensions between the ideals of respecting the community and of serving the scientific goals of the project, but it also epitomizes larger social tensions in Turkey. Burial practices follow Muslim rituals and the tomb of the sheikh is venerated as a holy place, but the government representative must support the secular laws of his/her country. The conflict which arose from the burial on top of the mound shows the conflict in Turkey between centralized authority and local politics, secular forces and traditional religious practices, and between foreigners and Turks. In this particular case, an ethical resolution was achieved through dialogue and the archaeologist was offered as

a middleman through whom the various parties could negotiate. The lack of accessibility for the boys in our second story perhaps led them to throw stones at the archaeologists, reflecting a larger divide between scientists and locals. It is a reminder that archaeology is not practiced in a power vacuum and that physical access to a site does not necessarily mean access to the information produced about it. Accessibility is not just a spatial relation but also concerns the flow of information. Would these children have adopted the same attitude had they had a better idea of what work archaeologists were doing? Outreach practiced by presenting a slide show of the work on the site to the villagers illustrates, on the one hand, the success behind the collaboration between archaeologists and local people. On the other hand, it also expresses our wish to take this collaboration further. Most of the team agrees that more outreach should be done. At the same time, it also reminds our team that, in this particular social and political context in southeastern Turkey, doing more outreach might even do harm or transgress acceptable boundaries and place the project at jeopardy.

Having known ups and downs, our collaboration between foreign archaeologists and local villagers has, in general, been productive and successful. Without deliberately setting up an outreach program in the village, and without claims to practicing a purely ethical archaeology, our project has provided stable incomes for some of the poorer families, given work opportunities to many disabled villagers, and sparked interest as well as a certain pride among the village's inhabitants for their historic site and cultural legacy. These three stories were meant to illustrate that ethical archaeology on the ground is best defined as a set of unwritten rules, negotiable and malleable on a daily basis, negotiated within a dialogue between archaeological team members, local communities, and the wider public, and not beholden to any universal set of abstract ethical principles.

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