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Please cite this as: Hale, A. and Kersting, T. 2024 New Challenges: Archaeological heritage management and the archaeology of the 18th to 20th centuries. Foreword, Internet Archaeology 66. <https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.66.1>

New Challenges: Archaeological heritage management and the archaeology of the 18th to 20th centuries. Foreword

Alex Hale and Thomas Kersting

In many places across Europe, it has long been common practice to protect, preserve and research monuments of the recent past. The many ways to approach archaeologies of the near present and recent past creates both a challenge and an opportunity for archaeological heritage management, and were considered in a number of papers from the 2023 EAC symposium and are now published here.

1. Introduction

The archaeology of the last 300 years from 1700 to 1999 has previously been termed 'modernity' or 'contemporary archaeology' and given other disciplinary-specific names. However, these terms can have specific connotations and associated issues. Eventually the EAC 2023 scientific committee settled on 'the archaeology of the 18th to 20th centuries', to focus on the chronological aspects of this period. Here we deal with sites, features and finds from the period following the start of industrialisation, obtained through excavation and documentation, and using techniques and methods applied in all archaeological disciplines. In terms of the naming of this period, beyond the geological term 'Anthropocene', which is also accompanied by its own complexities, Contemporary Archaeology may well be suitable, assuming we accept Harrison and Schofield's definition and explanation ([2010](#)) and expand the temporal range. But we should also acknowledge the complexities of engaging with this period and recognise that there are many ways to approach archaeologies of the near present and recent past.

The topic and the comparatively 'young' period are not completely new within the field of archaeological monument preservation, even if it has only been explicitly considered in relatively few monument protection laws. In many places across Europe, it has long been common practice to protect, preserve and research monuments of the recent past simply because they are there. This is both a



challenge and an opportunity for archaeological heritage management, both considered in a number of papers from the 2023 EAC symposium.

In this period of condensed and parallel traditions, archaeological findings must be analysed for their specific informative value and significance alongside other material sources on an equal footing with pictorial and written evidence, as well as audio-visual sources and oral traditions. Owing to the great range of sources available to us, archaeological heritage management practitioners must ask themselves almost daily to what extent should objects and monuments from the 18th to the 20th centuries be examined or even preserved? A careful and well-founded decision based on an interdisciplinary perspective has a special significance here, and must be part of the wider discussion in order to recognise, engage and consider community participation in cultural heritage management praxis.

While archaeology is trying to integrate new approaches academically, terminologically and methodologically, archaeological heritage management, with its pragmatic approach, has been facing the challenge for years by making decisions within the framework of the respective legal possibilities and in doing so has gone through several learning phases (Kersting [2022](#); [2023](#)). These decisions, which lead either to the preservation of the 'modern' structures in the ground (primary protection), or their excavation and documentation (secondary protection), require in each case new strategies of monument justification, negotiation, and mediation in view of new historical contents. This in turn enables newly adapted strategies and techniques of documentation and salvage, storage and conservation, in view of the scope of the newly recognised heritage landscapes, sites and assemblages, and the large quantities of finds. In addition, the finds partly consist of new materials, which are not present in either prehistoric or medieval archaeologies. The emerging range of materials and their on-going mutable materiality presents further complexities when studying, protecting and interpreting the evidence from this period.

Institutions entrusted with the collection and permanent care of archaeological finds are also faced with selection decisions, as these are characterised in the recent era by an extreme increase in the types of material. In addition, industrial production has joined handicraft in the manufacture of objects, and so extensive specialist knowledge is becoming necessary to understand or interpret such new objects. The development of collection, curation, retention and de-accessioning strategies for archaeological objects from the last 300 years is therefore imperative.

The results of archaeology in and of the contemporary period can shed light on individual events and fates, as well as overarching or overall social developments. A number of research projects touch on topics that affect contemporary society and interest many people, demonstrating that archaeological interpretations carry great weight in public perception. This is both an exciting and somewhat daunting aspect of archaeology today.

Archaeology of the 18th to 20th centuries has an important role to play in documenting sites of memory from a period that has been dominated by war and terror - a field also known as conflict archaeology (Theune [2018](#)). Often these are sites that were the scenes of crimes against humanity, and thus, in addition to a strong emotional component, they contain evidence and are crime scenes. As a



result, archaeological heritage preservation work gains weight because it is accompanied by a special interest from the public, and opportunities to participate in political education can develop - in the form of exhibitions (e.g. [Exclusion](#), Haubold-Stolle *et al.* [2020](#); [Modern Times](#)) and learning environments such as within school curricula and community learning approaches (Hale *et al.* [2017](#)). This is especially true for monuments of industrial and urban history, war relics or objects from the era of colonialism, where such research sits at the centre of societal discourse. In the case of the latter, it is always a question of dealing with the testimonies in an ethically justifiable way. The material remains of war and terror take archaeology to and beyond its limits: they become evidence, crime scenes, anchors for commemoration and political education.

For the EAC Heritage Symposium, we welcomed presentations that demonstrated a clear connection to the practice and theory of archaeological heritage management. In doing so, we wanted to explore some basic questions:

- Which archaeological sources of the recent era do we record and preserve? And conversely which ones do we ignore?
- Why should we record and preserve them? What is the conservation or monument value and the value for society?
- Which of these sources should we document at all? And with which archaeological methods?

In order to address these overarching questions, the scientific committee settled on the following themes:

- Archaeological witnesses of industrial and urban development
- War(s) and terror as a task of archaeology
- Mass production and new materials as a challenge for archaeology

The aim was to represent as broad a range of heritage practice as possible, with as many examples from all over Europe. The symposium programme was designed to reflect temporal depth as well as the thematic range in a balanced way. However, it was clear that conflict archaeology would be significantly represented in the programme and in the subsequent published articles. This evidence of atrocities across Europe, over the past three centuries, can provide both archaeologists and the wider public with a better understanding of the terror that was perpetuated. The evidence comes in a range of scales, enabling us to engage both with individual human beings and the industrialisation of mass-terror. The presentations and articles range in their diversity right across Europe but we can begin to see trends, research questions and potential solutions appearing. A number of examples and potential routes for future work are proposed by [Alex Hale](#) in his final remarks.

The Symposium

After the welcoming addresses (Figure 1) from Ina Hanemann (Ministry for Regional Identity, Local Government, Building and Digitalization of North Rhine-Westphalia), Dr Corinna Franz (LVR-Culture and Cultural Landscape Preservation), and Prof. Dr Michael Rind (Association of State Archaeologists in the Federal Republic of



Germany), EAC-president Dr Ann Degraeve (Europae Archaeologiae Consilium) opened the conference.

First [Laurent Olivier](#) (France) gave an excellent and inspiring overview of 'Contemporary Archaeologies and Cultural Heritage in the Anthropocenic Age'. This contribution set the tone for the whole symposium as it questioned the role of archaeology plays when it comes to our recent past.



Figure 1: Opening of the Conference, Greeting Address by Prof. M. Rind (Image credit: T. Kersting)

We divided the subsequent presentations into five thematic panels, and each session was chaired by a renowned practitioner, who gave short introductions.

The first panel 'Protection, Management and Tensions' was chaired by Leonard de Wit (former EAC President, Netherlands). In five contributions from Spain, Finland, Hungary, Poland and Sweden; [Jaime Almansa-Sánchez](#), Liisa Seppänen, József Laszlovszky (the latter two not included in this volume), [Agnieszka Oniszczyk and Jakub Wrzosek](#) and [Alexander Gill](#) dealt with general management issues, legislation and the specific challenges of archaeological monument preservation in their countries.

The second panel 'Challenges, Choices and Ceramics' was chaired by Barney Sloane (English Heritage). Four contributions from Israel, Finland, Austria and Germany addressed the archaeology of the 18th to 20th centuries in the Holy Land (Guy Stiebel, not in this volume), and the challenges of the effects, be they a result of industrial mass-production ([Eva Steigberger](#) and [Christoph Keller](#)) or the extremely large numbers of findspots generated by automatic detection ([Niko Anttiroiko](#)).



The third panel 'The Holocaust, Conflict and Changing Approaches', chaired by Thomas Kersting (Brandenburg Heritage Authorities) presented five contributions. They showed varying approaches to the topic from France ([Vincent Carpentier](#)), Austria ([Barbara Hausmair and Attila Dészi](#)), Belgium ([Wouter Gheyle, Sam De Decker and Birger Stichelbaut](#)) and Lithuania ([Gediminas Petrauskas, Lijana Muradian and Augustina Kurilienė](#)). Here the recording of the remnants of war and terror in the landscape, the archaeological methods and practices used as well as their mediation with the public, have already made enormous progress in recent decades. [Gilly Carr](#) presents a long overdue proposal to adopt a more pragmatic approach to Holocaust Heritage in the 21st century, many original sites with links to the Holocaust are already destroyed or otherwise reused. We take the opportunity within the current publication to present an additional contribution that addresses dealing with the remnants of war and terror in Germany/Brandenburg ([Thomas Kersting](#)).

The fourth panel 'Developing Interdisciplinary Practices', chaired by Claudia Theune (Vienna University, Austria), included three specific case studies from Germany and Poland. These discussed the archaeological traces of two end-of-war-crimes ([Michael Baales, Marcus Weidner and Manuel Zeiler](#)), the excavation of a huge Soviet prisoner-of-war cemetery and the complexities that can occur when working within communities in a publicly visible project ([Uta Halle and Cathrin Hähn](#)), and an archaeological survey of a devastated area of the Warsaw Ghetto ([Jacek Konik](#)). Two evaluative artefact studies came from France and the Czech Republic. Juliette Brangé (and colleagues Michaël Landolt and Theo Aubry, not published here) presented a comparative typological study on prisoner objects in France between the years 1939 and 1946. [Pavel Vařeka](#) discussed the protection of archaeological remains of camps from the Nazi and Stalinist era in West Bohemia.

Finally, the fifth panel 'Significance, Values and Emerging Themes', chaired by Jürgen Kunow (former head of the LVR Office for Archaeological Monument Preservation in the Rhineland) brought together four contributions from Germany, Ireland and Bulgaria, which in various respects go beyond the boundaries of archaeology. [Michael Malliaris](#) pointed to how exploring additional levels of meaning can enhance the public's understanding of archaeology. [Emer Dennehy](#) showed the influence of archaeological monument preservation strategies on urban and transport planning. [Kaloyan Pramatarov](#) used the museum management in Sofia, Bulgaria, to describe the political exploitation of archaeology in different systems. The panel concluded with the question, *What comes after industrial archaeology?* by [Anja Prust](#), who presented current results of a cultural-historical inventory project in landscapes dominated by the lignite mining industry.



Figure 2: Closing remarks and acknowledgements by Ann Degraeve and photograph of all participants. Image credit: T. Kersting

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleagues on the scientific board, Erich Claßen, Regina Smolnik, Rebecca Jones, and Jenny Butterworth, and all participants who came to Bonn in 2023 to make it a very lively symposium. We also thank the symposium organisers and museum staff who hosted us at the LVR LandesMuseum, Bonn and the excursion organisers and the guides who shared their passion for their heritage and places along the route through the North Eifel Region. Finally, thanks to all contributors who have worked hard and submitted their papers within a tight timescale for the EAC 2023 symposium publications and to both publishers (Judith Winters at Internet Archaeology and Katalin Sebők and Erzsébet Jerem at Archaeolingua), for their professional work, and keeping the editors and contributors to time. The resultant publications, both online and in print, are a testament to their hard work, for which we are grateful. The articles published in this volume, some in a considerably more extended and developed form, have undergone both an internal and expert external evaluation.

When we were reading the papers by authors from so many countries, we wanted to ensure that the authors' "voices" could still be heard. Different people write English in different ways, using a range of translations. Adjusting them too much e.g. during proofreading, to a specific style, risks the loss of the authors' identities. We have tried to retain the authors' styles, something that archaeology in the contemporary should aim to achieve. Maybe this should be a different way to publish. The important thing for us is that many regions of Europe are represented, and this is something that should be heard and noticed in the texts too. We believe that in



current times, the diversity in Europe, not only of heritage landscapes, sites, events and artefacts, but also of languages, is important to keep visible.

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