ETHICS IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

EDITED BY
SARAH KIELT COSTELLO AND SARAH LEPINSKI



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William Caraher

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For James

Introduction

Archaeological Ethics in the Twenty-first Century

Sarah Kielt Costello and Sarah E. Lepinski

ASOR and Ethics

While ethical decisions may not always be in the forefront of our professional minds, they are a part of everything we do in archaeology. The considerable number of volumes addressing ethics in archaeology underscore its importance to the field, particularly in the last quarter century (e.g., Hamilakis and Duke 2007; Lynott and Wylie 1995; McGill, Hollowell and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2011; Meskell and Pels 2005; Scarre and Scarre 2006; Zimmerman, Vitelli and Hollowell-Zimmer 2003). Even with the growing attention to ethics in the field of archaeology, there is not a single volume focused specifically on the archaeology of ancient western Asia[1] and the Mediterranean region. Attention to principles of behavior within the professional practices of archaeologists working in these regions is timely; as a society, we are at a moment of multiple reckonings, especially related to race, gender, and the environment. Like many professional organizations, the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR, an international association that supports archaeology in western Asia, north Africa, and the Mediterranean) is confronting various ethical challenges, which are outlined further below. This book is intended to foreground a variety of ethical issues that are embedded in archaeological practice, which have significant resonance in this moment of social upheavals and historical reflection, particularly as they pertain to ASOR-affiliated scholars.

The notion of what constitutes "archaeological ethics" has changed dramatically over the centuries. From the Renaissance, when there was no distinction between archaeology and plundering, to Napoleon, whose looting was at least accompanied by an effort at scientific description, the early days of archaeology were not characterized by reflections on moral principles underlying professional conduct. Archaeology from across the Mediterranean, north Africa, and western Asia was closely tied to the colonial exploitation of those regions by European powers and by what Yannis Hamilakis characterizes as the commodification of archaeological artifacts and their transformation into national symbolic capital (2007: 17–18). While we (here, "we" refers loosely to the community of scholars researching these regions in antiquity) have made numerous changes to the way we do our work since that time, the legacy of our colonial past remains present throughout our work, from the terminologies we use, to ques-

1 The "Near East" is the traditional scholarly term for western Asia, and the term currently in use by ASOR. The editors prefer "western Asia" since it does not assume a western perspective on the region.

tions of cultural patrimony and the relationships among excavators and local communities.

The traditional nature of our field and the way that archaeological projects frequently model themselves on their forbears mean that we are often slow to change and adapt. We tend to be gradual adopters of new theoretical approaches, for instance, and slow to adopt digital recording methodologies in the field. In the face of the broad social movements that are shaping society today, it has taken time for scholars to see how those conversations pertain ethically—and otherwise—to the often arcane work that we do in archaeology: we have been late to the racial justice movement, late to the #metoo conversation (we still never really had the feminism conversation, in fact), slow to admit that our field is dominated by white persons of privilege, even reluctant to acknowledge obvious problems, such as how difficult it is to carry out archaeological fieldwork while disabled, pregnant, or parenting, and how those difficulties affect our ability to gain or maintain a sustainable position in our field.

Recently, however, ASOR has undertaken a number of bold steps to address various ethical imperatives. The recent move to change ASOR's name illustrates both progress as well as the conservatism of our field. The "American School of Oriental Study and Research in Palestine" was founded in 1900. The association's name was changed in 1921 to The American Schools of Oriental Research. The acronym "ASOR" has long been used interchangeably with the longer name, in recent years in part to avoid the increasingly problematic term "Oriental," with its associated history of derogatory racial connotations. "Oriental" also put a limit on the directionality of the organization's research: people from the west studying people from the east. In recent decades a number of ASOR members argued for a name change, but it was not until 2021 that, as an organization, ASOR took the corrective step in making the change to the American Society of Overseas Research. In conversations, some scholars continue to insist that "Oriental" is not offensive, that it simply means "east," without acknowledging the implicit directionality and the historical structures from which its use derives. The desire of some to keep things as they are, while ignoring the colonial implications of the name itself, illustrates the need for a re-examination of ethics—of the principles underlying behavior and established practices and perspectives—in all aspects of our work.

Addressing our directionality problem, in which scholars from "the west" study cultures from "the east," must go beyond a name change. As of 2022, 30% of ASOR membership was based outside the US, so making the annual meeting accessible via both funding and the virtual meeting is imperative to equity of access. The virtual meeting format, which started out of necessity during the Covid pandemic, will continue in the future as part of a new hybrid format for annual meetings. ASOR has raised funds to support attendance at the Annual Meeting for scholars from across the organization's geographic areas of study who might otherwise find travel costs to a meeting in the US prohibitive. The 2022 virtual meeting included sessions with Arabic and Farsi interpretation to broaden access to a wider audience.

Recent plenary addresses at the annual meeting signal the scope of ASOR's aspirational values. The 2021 plenary by Dr. Morag Kersel, "Living with Legacies: ASOR Archaeo-activism and a Future for 21st Century Archaeology," set out an array of ethical challenges along with examples of current scholarship that seeks to address them. The 2022 plenary by Dr. Solange Ashby, "Women of the Sacred South: Nubian Women in the Temple and Upon the Throne," signals ASOR's commitment to ASOR scholarship across a broader geographic expanse of the ancient world. ASOR has also instituted committees to address ethical issues; a standing DEI committee is developing initiatives including diversity scholarships to fund fieldwork and annual meeting attendance for scholars from underrepresented groups. An Ad Hoc Climate Impact Committee, recognizing that climate change impacts the organization's commitment to stewardship of cultural heritage, produced an extensive report in 2022 detailing the climate impact of ASOR activities, as well as the potential mitigation of possible solutions.

The ASOR mission is "to initiate, encourage, and support research into, and public understanding of, the cultures and history of the Near East and the wider Mediterranean, from the earliest times." Fostering fieldwork, scholarship, and education around the ancient cultures of the region of the eastern Mediterranean and beyond has long been the means to support that mission. In recent years, especially inspired by the tragic destruction wrought by recent wars in western Asia, ASOR has taken up the charge of education and advocacy for cultural heritage protections. The Cultural Heritage Initiative (CHI), instituted in 2014, partners with various government and non-government organizations to "document, protect, and preserve the cultural heritage of war-torn Syria, northern Iraq, and Libya" (asor.org).

Public outreach is also a component of the stated mission. The 2019 plenary address by Eric Cline took up that topic, addressing the need for work that reaches a broader public through popular publications and educational opportunities. In 2022, a new ASOR award was added, the Community Engagement and Outreach Award, to recognize such efforts. Public outreach is achieved, in part, through the growing resources available on ASOR's YouTube channel. Cultural heritage resources available there include numerous recorded lectures on the work of CHI, along with a "Tutorials for Cultural Heritage" series introducing open-source data management tools. The "educational resources" series offers videos on ancient Nubia; such videos are helpful to educators seeking to expand the traditional canon of their courses. The plenary lectures mentioned above, along with a number of other lectures, are also available to the public via the YouTube channel.

The significant developments within ASOR's professional structure and the broader focus of its programming provide a solid foundation with which to cultivate further ethical approaches in the field of archaeology. The editors hope that the chapters in this volume will inspire even deeper reflection on ways to advance the mission of ASOR, to protect cultural heritage, and to consider our role in supporting our colleagues and our communities, local and global.

Ethics in Archaeological Practice

What does it mean to undertake archaeological practice in an ethical manner? If we know anything in the first years of the 2020s, it is that people are not in agreement about what constitutes ethical or moral behavior. Hot-button issues abound, including abortion, climate, racial justice, public health, gun violence, police violence, right down to what constitutes "truth." While the ethical issues facing archaeologists may be perceived as less controversial, they are nonetheless connected to larger, complex social issues that embody the challenges associated with equality, inclusivity, and politics.

In 2003, Randall McGuire observed that at the start of the 21st century, archaeological ethics became concerned with relations among people, rather than relations between archaeologists and things (McGuire 2003: vii). It was no longer enough to gather data ethically and to ensure its speedy publication. Organized and published by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), the volume McGuire introduced took up ethics as they pertain to the archaeological record, to diverse publics, and to colleagues in the field (Zimmerman, Vitelli, and Hollowell-Zimmer 2003). Each of these areas remains vital, twenty years hence. And yet, the reckonings of recent years, with the history of racial, colonial, and gender-based violence in particular, as well the evident climate crisis we are facing, add urgency to particular aspects of archaeological practice. While our primary work involves understanding ancient societies and cultural practices through material culture, the editors argue that this work requires active engagement with current issues, as well as with sometimes volatile political and religious controversies. We must continue to assess the ethical principles that guide us and do our work in a way that furthers these principles.

What the editors are asking, through this volume, is that archaeologists recognize the many places in which our work intersects with ethical issues and consider how we can integrate ethical choices into our practices. Vigilant attention, not lip service, is required if we are to uphold our

responsibilities as stewards of the cultures and people of the past and present. The editors ascribe to the view of Chris Scarre and Geoffrey Scarre as stated in their 2006 book on archaeological ethics, that ethics is not checking off the required boxes in the most minimal way, but rather about "energetically pursuing the good" (2006: 3) in all facets our work, including the way we work with one another, the manner in which we engage across institutional structures encompassed within the broader ecosystem in which archaeologists and aligned professionals work, and how we embrace the legacies and futures of our discipline.

Exploring the range of what is encompassed by the ethical "good" for professionals engaged in work in the field of archaeology of western Asia and the Mediterranean regions is part of the project of this volume. The scholars herein consider a range of archaeological practice—teaching, field work, grant writing, research, cultural heritage, and professional advocacy—and identify some of the myriad ethical issues we face in each of these areas. In most of the chapters, what the authors identify as "the good"—the ethical goal worth pursuing—is not particularly controversial. For instance, we should ensure that ourselves and our colleagues are safe and treated respectfully, and that opportunities are made available on an equitable basis. We should actively engage to identify and correct biased underpinnings in the discipline in which we work. We should reckon with the realities of climate change and how it intersects with our profession. We should strive to protect cultural heritage and in coordination with the appropriate communities. The chapters in this volume explore these ethical objectives and how we can work to further them.

It is in the details that we find space for debate. For example, in 2022, the ASOR Ad Hoc Climate Impact Committee administered a survey regarding the ASOR Annual Meeting and its carbon impact. The fact that the climate is changing and posing risks to society is no longer a subject for debate. The matter of how ASOR should ethically address the problem remains more challenging. Travel to an annual meeting carries a carbon impact. Furthermore, members whose location, finances, or physical challenges make it difficult to attend an in-person annual meeting are at a disadvantage. Remote meetings address both climate impact and equity issues; however, they limit the professional contact we find so valuable. Hybrid meetings are an ideal solution in many ways, though they may limit professional networking for those not attending in person. In decisions like this, members must choose how to weigh ethical issues against both cost and the professional aims of the organization. Similar "devil in the details" spaces are identified by many of the authors in this volume—the ethical "good" may be readily identified, but putting it in practice can be more complicated.

As professionals working in the field, in universities, in museums, and in other institutions and organizations, we are guided by various codes of ethics. In their book exploring ethics in anthropology as embedded practice, Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels outline the benefits and limits of codified professional ethics (2005: 2). Professionally, we are united by the desire to reveal and understand the past, to educate, and to share in that work with as broad a community as possible. But what does that mean, in practice? How accessible are our publications? What languages should we publish in? Who has the resources to pursue a PhD in our field? Theoretically (or generally), we agree that treating each other "well" is important, but what does that mean, in practice? How do hierarchies within our organizational structures—in the field and in our institutions—impact behaviors? Whose names go on the publications? How do we protect vulnerable members of our team? How do we support those in less formalized roles? How do we work productively and respectfully with the community in which our work is based?

This volume is not a comprehensive examination of all ethical issues in archaeology. It need not be; there are many excellent volumes on ethics in archaeology. Chris Scarre and Geoffrey Scarre's volume *The Ethics of Archaeology* (2006) pairs archaeologists with philosophers to address moral questions. The 2003 SAA volume on ethics mentioned above includes Alison Wylie's excellent theoretical formulation of ethics in archaeology,

a history of the topic by Mark Lynott, and numerous case studies (Wylie 2003 and Lynott 2003 in Zimmerman, Vitelli, and Hollowell-Zimmer 2003). *Embedded Ethics* has anthropology more broadly as its subject but includes critical examinations of how archaeological practice intersects with living communities and the ethical responsibilities of archaeologists and heritage professionals (Meskell 2005 in Meskell and Pels 2005). Rather, the point of departure for the current volume sits squarely on candid discussions and reflections of current practices with the aim to explore pressing topics and issues surrounding archaeological work and to address professional responsibilities surrounding conduct and authority in archaeology. Within these discussions/reflections, the authors underscore the necessity for presenting ideas for paths forward and solutions.

Contents of the Volume

The call for contributors to the volume generated a wide-range of papers reflecting ethics in practice from across a broad sweep of archaeological work and drawing from specific case studies and experiences. These papers range from a "look back" into efforts to raise consciousness within the ASOR membership regarding gender equality in the field, to looking forward, determining the kinds of training necessary for future archaeologists to conduct our work ethically in light of accelerating climate change, globally, and to ensure inclusivity in the field.

The chapter topics within represent a selection of issues scholars find pressing and relevant. Certain issues have emerged as urgent in the past few years, even during the last few months of our writing period: climate change, sexual harassment and assault with the #metoo movement, and racial justice with the Black Lives Matter movement. The country was mobilized, at last, by the brutal and tragic death of George Floyd in 2021. We must not wait until such moments of crisis to talk about how issues of human rights, safety, and justice intersect with our work.

The overarching goals for the volume are to gain deeper perspectives on current ethical practices and issues, to raise awareness of how archaeologists are addressing these issues, and to offer guidance and solutions where possible. The chapters that follow explore ethical challenges facing archaeologists and serve to illuminate potential paths forward for the ASOR community (and beyond) that are proactive rather than reactive, and which offer models of high standards of ethical practice for the 21st century.

The chapters are presented in three sections. The first, **Ethical Practices Towards One Another**, addresses how we treat our colleagues and how we ensure our field offers equal and safe opportunities to all scholars, in the classroom, the field, and in our professional organizations. Beth Alpert Nakhai opens the discussion with a look back at her activism over her years as an ASOR member, and how she has worked with ASOR towards greater gender equity. Her personal account reveals both how immediately ethical issues (in this instance, the lack of gender equity in archaeology) are felt, and how they affect the trajectory of our careers, but also how impactful each person's engagement with ethics can be. Laura Heath-Stout explores how archaeologists build ethical, diverse, and inclusive research communities, identifying the barriers that hinder recruitment and retention of marginalized peoples in archaeology. Grace Erny and Dimitri Nakassis address sexism and gender-based harassment in archaeology and academia, proposing concrete steps toward creating a more ethical and equitable discipline. Debby Sneed and Mason Shrader argue for active recruitment and inclusion of people with disabilities in archaeological fieldwork, demonstrating how existing structures and accommodations for nondisabled colleagues might serve as models moving forward.

The second section, **Ethical Practices Across the Discipline**, includes chapters that address the very immediate ways that we do our work and engage with our institutions and colleagues. Nadhira Hall and Maggie Beeler discuss the importance of teaching race and ethnicity in the ancient world and provide resources and context for instructors engaged in teaching inclusive and anti-racist archaeologies. Undergraduate teach-

ing, especially to non-majors, is one of the ways that we as professionals and experts reach a wider audience. It is here that we can have a profound impact on how the ancient world is viewed and understood. Beyond the classroom, another critical point of engagement is in the museum and heritage space. Public and private collections of archaeological objects comprise an important part of our data about the ancient world and often serve as the entry point for interest in the subject among the general public. Sarah Kielt Costello addresses how we handle works that lack good information about findspot and argues against the polarizing term "orphan objects" and in favor of a more active engagement by scholars around the problems of unprovenienced objects. Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir takes up the challenging overlap between religious spaces and public heritage, looking at both museumification and de-museumification of such sacred spaces. In recognition that all of our professional work relies on funding, Christopher Thornton and Sarah Lepinski provide information to support the ethical application for, and awarding of, grants for archaeological research.

The chapters in the third section, **Legacies and Futures**, ask us to critically examine the foundations of the discipline and to consider our responsibilities looking forward. Just as the United States is slowly starting to reckon with the racism of our history and the ways racism has been institutionalized, we must likewise reckon with the racism that has been woven into our discipline for centuries. Annelies Van de Ven argues that we can herald the accomplishments of the early "heroes" of our discipline while still finding fault with their biases and actions. Louise Hitchcock digs into an early, and problematic, effort to decolonize Classics by revisiting Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* within the context of her pedagogical experiences. And finally, Benjamin Porter closes the volume by looking to the future, and how we as practitioners must work with the changing climate in mind.

This volume, if it is a critique of our field, is a friendly one issued by professionals working across institutional types and contributing to the vibrant membership of ASOR and wider professional communities. The authors here in some cases suggest best practices or ways forwards; there are undoubtedly other paths, other solutions, and other ways to frame these issues. You are invited to consider the perspectives presented here and reflect on your own practices.

The challenges of compiling this volume during the pandemic of 2020 and following meant that some of the chapters originally slated for inclusion could not be written, as authors faced numerous personal and professional challenges, from expanded and intensified workloads to a lack of childcare, increasing institutional responsibility, loss of financial security, and general anxiety. We are living in what is daily referred to as an "unprecedented time." A time of pandemic, climate change, racial reckoning, sexual misconduct reckoning, and political violence in the paragon of stable democracy. Indeed, many of those "unprecedented moments" played out as the volume was being written, and it changed as a result—papers were withdrawn and some topics shifted as issues emerged. There are countless ethical issues not addressed here, in part due to the failure of the editors to find contributors to address them as pressures facing prospective authors mounted. In some cases, there was simply a lack of appeal for engaging in a reflective essay on a sensitive and complex topic, particularly in the face of multiple professional responsibilities. For example, we would have liked to hear from an excavation PI about the various ethical challenges encountered when directing a project, from safety in the field to publication practices. We also would have liked to explore responsibilities in engaging with the local communities in an area of study. Ethics surrounding digital resources, publication, and data management form another fundamental topic in the field that we had hoped to include in the volume. Ethical approaches and perspectives in conservation and cultural heritage protection and preservation are also missing here.

As we reflect on what this volume achieves and where it falls short, we find that while we were able to bring in a range of voices at different stages in their careers and from a variety

of perspectives, the book lacks equitable representation of scholars from western Asia and the Mediterranean. Overall, however, we are encouraged by the trend towards open-access publication and of providing translations of work in the languages of the area of study in journals and online resources in particular. Changing the directionality of our organization's name is not enough; we must work towards broader inclusivity in our work, both in terms of whose voices we hear and who has access to our research products.

We hope that readers will find this book helpful, thought-provoking, and ultimately inadequate. We hope, that is, that it encourages deeper introspection and inspires further writing on ethics in archaeological practice We ask you to join the conversation: contribute a paper to a future volume on ethics, organize a session at a future meeting. We hope this is the first of more volumes on the subject, and that the reexamination of our profession through an ethical lens becomes a standard part of the work of ASOR-affiliated archaeologists.

Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank the contributing authors for engaging in this project with us and for sharing your insights, reflections, and research on archaeological practices. We recognize that, in many instances, addressing pressing issues surrounding ethical behaviors and principles in our discipline required courage and commitment.

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I. Ethical Practices Towards One Another

Chapter 1

From Consciousness Raising to Community Action

Addressing Gender Inequality in ASOR and in Our Field

Beth Alpert Nakhai

Abstract

When I first began attending ASOR's annual meetings in the 1980s, gender equality, a goal for which many of us had long struggled, was neither a value nor an expectation within Near Eastern archaeology. Not many women attended the meetings and fewer still held leadership positions either within ASOR or on excavations; women with tenure lines at academic institutions were rare. Change, slow as it has been, has resulted in more women pursuing careers in archaeology, participating in ASOR meetings, assuming leadership positions within ASOR and in the field, and (perhaps) experiencing less danger and discrimination in field settings. When I look back on those changes in which I have played a part, I view them within a continuum that, for me, has roots in the Consciousness Raising groups of my post-college years.

A commitment to equality is not a matter of personal choice; it is a moral and ethical imperative, an obligation to which we all must commit. Equality is mandated by law in the United States and elsewhere throughout the world. Equality means more than equity, more than numerical parity. The lack of gender equality within our field reflects an ethical failing that has, by dint of the deep ways in which gender-based discrimination is embedded within scholarship, led to false narratives about the past. Only by embracing diversity and inclusivity in the present can we, scholars of the past, hope to reconstruct that past in all its richness and complexity.

This essay considers those changes that have helped to place gender equality at the forefront of our work, and that have facilitated advances toward gender equality within ASOR. My choice of first-person narrative reflects my conviction that activism for equality is a moral and ethical responsibility that each of us must personally assume—and that our personal convictions and actions cannot be separated from our professional accomplishments.