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Introduction: Archaeological Labor in Historical Contexts

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ABSTRACT

In this Introduction, we present a special issue on Histories of Labor in Archaeology. We begin by reviewing past work on archaeological labor and advocating for a broad definition of the term. Contributors to this issue address, among other themes, divisions of labor, worker specialization, and new methodologies for the study of archaeological labor across time and space. We then introduce each of the ten contributions, which address varieties of labor involved in the archaeological process from Türkiye, Germany, Palestine, Egypt, Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States, from the nineteenth century through the 1990s. We conclude by arguing for the study of work in the past as a means of imagining labor solidarity in archaeology for the future.

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In the early 2010s, it was not difficult to make the case that a PhD project focused on workers and labor in archaeology would be new and different. At the time, it seemed like a glaring gap when so many other aspects of the archaeological research process and archaeological political economy – from antiquities laws to Munsell charts – had been scrutinized and complicated. Today, that situation has changed. A growing number of researchers are looking directly at labor, writing about archaeological work at different sites, and in various regions. To us, the time has come to imagine a special issue on the subject, bringing together a group of these researchers and encouraging the kind of exchange and dialogue that enables research communities to connect and form. In doing so, we hope to draw out transnational and transregional connections and distinctions, as well as to deepen the examination of particular issues related to labor that have emerged during the proliferation of discussion on the topic.

Archaeological labor has not gone unnoticed, historically. Since the earliest archaeological excavations, workers have appeared in photographs, wage books, diaries, memoirs, and other archival documents. Beginning in the 1980s, archaeologists informed by Marxism and critical theory began examining how the employment structures of the discipline reflect and constitute the unequal relationships characteristic of capitalism.[1] In the late 1990s and early 2000s, others started to draw from the reflexive approaches of postprocessual archaeology, looking at the relationships involved in archaeological knowledge production, and barriers to multivocality that included – but did not always single out – labor.[2] Meanwhile, scholars working in colonial and postcolonial contexts have explored the dynamics of foreign archaeologists and local labor forces,[3] while others have analyzed the relationships between national archaeologies and Indigenous (and otherwise-racialized) labor.[4]

But most of the research undertaken on archaeological labor has been conducted by individual and disconnected researchers. Aside from a well-attended Theoretical Archaeology Group session on the subject in 2021,[5] opportunities have been rare for groups of scholars examining the politics, economics, and experiences of work in archaeology to hold their findings up against one another and see what common themes emerge with labor as a lens on the archaeological process. Identifying such themes also suggests that archaeological labor could be a point of interdisciplinary dialogue between archaeology and otherwise-distant fields.[6] For instance, historians of science interested in labor have recently called for inquiries into 'the differentials

1 For diverse entry points, see Robert Paynter, "Field or Factory? Concerning the Degradation of Archaeological Labor," in *The Socio-Politics of Archaeology*, ed. Joan M Gero, David M Lacy, and Michael L Blakey (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1983), 17–29; Mark P. Leone et al., "Toward a Critical Archaeology [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 3 (1987): 283–302, https://doi.org/10.1086/203531; Thomas C Patterson, "The Political Economy of Archaeology in the United States," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 155–74, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.28.1.155; Michael Shanks and Randall H McGuire, "The Craft of Archaeology," *American Antiquity* 61, no. 1 (1996): 75–88, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002731600050046; Randall H McGuire, *Archaeology as Political Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

2 Carolyn Hamilton, "Faultlines: The Construction of Archaeological Knowledge at Çatalhöyük," in *Towards Reflexive Method in Archaeology: The Example at* Çatalhöyük, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research/British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 2000), 119–27; Asa Berggren and Ian Hodder, "Social Practice, Method, and Some Problems of Field Archaeology," *American Antiquity* 68, no. 2 (2003): 421–34, https://doi.org/10.2307/3557102; Matt Edgeworth, "Multiple Origins, Development, and Potential of Ethnographies of Archaeology," in *Ethnographies of Archaeological Practice: Cultural Encounters, Material Transformations*, ed. Matt Edgeworth (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006), 1–19.

3 Quetzil Castañeda, *In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichén Itzá* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Ashish Chadha, "Visions of Discipline: Sir Mortimer Wheeler and the Archaeological Method in India (1944–1948)," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, no. 3 (2001): 378–401, https://doi.org/10.1177/146960530200200305; Nick Shepherd, "'When the Hand That Holds the Trowel Is Black…' Disciplinary Practices of Self-Representation and the Issue of 'Native' Labour in Archaeology," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no. 3 (2003): 334–52, https://doi.org/10.1177/14696053030033003; Wendy Doyon, "On Archaeological Labor in Modern Egypt," in *Histories of Egyptology Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. William Carruthers (New York, 2015), 141–56; Allison Mickel, "Essential Excavation Experts: Alienation and Agency in the History of Archaeological Labor," *Archaeologies* 15, no. 2 (2019): 181–205, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-019-09356-9.

4 Cheryl Claassen, "Black and White Women at Irene Mound," *Southeastern Archaeology* 12, no. 2 (1993): 137–47; Lisa C Breglia, "Keeping World Heritage in the Family: A Genealogy of Maya Labour at Chichén Itzá," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 11, no. 5 (2005): 385–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250500337421; Sam Holley-Kline, "Archaeology, Wage Labor, and Kinship in Rural Mexico, 1934–1974," *Ethnohistory* 69, no. 2 (2022): 197–221, https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-9522189.

5 https://web.stanford.edu/group/tag2021/cgi-bin/wordpress/open-sessions/.

6 William Carruthers and Stéphane Van Damme, "Disassembling Archeology, Reassembling the Modern World," *History of Science* 55, no. 3 (2017): 255–72, https://doi.org/10.1177/0073275317719849; Christina Riggs, "Shouldering the Past: Photography, Archaeology, and Collective Effort at the Tomb of Tutankhamun," *History of Science* 55, no. 3 (2017): 336–63, https://doi.org/10.1177/0073275316676282.

of power that imbue only some labor with value and only some laborers with authority,' and understandings of 'the products of scientific work as reflective of broader political economies of labor,' objectives in which we and the contributors to this issue have clear stakes.[7] As this collection shows, the study of archaeological labor stands to benefit a scholarly audience beyond disciplinary boundaries.[8] In addition to signifying a shift from archaeological labor as an occasional, idiosyncratic interest of particular researchers into a robust and active area of consistent focus, this special issue allows us to identify echoes, resonances, entryways and takeaways across places and time periods where archaeology has *worked*.

The contributions we collect here demonstrate the utility of a broad definition of archaeological labor, including archaeologists working in academia and the commercial sector as well as members of local, descendent, and Indigenous communities who have become experts through employment and experience. The breadth of this definition encompasses the range of contributors to the archaeological process. While disciplinary ethics now instantiate archaeology's accountability to living communities, there remain open questions about archaeologists' *different* obligations and relationships with distinct sorts of communities. Examining the range of activities that may all accurately be called archaeological labor, and drawing out what is both shared and particular about those activities, opens possibilities for a deeper understanding of how archaeological knowledge is produced and what has, historically, been left out. In so doing, we think about what archaeological work – whether in the trench, in the lab, in the classroom, or elsewhere – creates avenues for solidarity and consciousness across nationality, race, gender, age, ability, and even history. Our contributors explore varieties of labor in the service not just of expanding the historiography of archaeology, but also in conjunction with ongoing efforts to build a more just discipline: one that recognizes the contributions of those whose work creates the very possibility of archaeology, but who have typically gone unacknowledged in the discipline's canon.

The ten articles we collect here begin from the shared recognition that the exclusion of workers in much archaeological publication is a constitutive element of disciplinary epistemology, not limited to individual sites, regions, or scholars.[9] While diverse forms of exclusion and silencing may be at play, our contributors explore themes that resonate across national borders and historical periods.[10] Among other cross-cutting themes, our authors explore how divisions of labor draw from, and contribute to, different kinds of worker specialization and expertise, while forging novel methodological tools for the study of archaeological labor across time and space.

Contributors to this special issue demonstrate how the possibilities for fieldwork depend on different kinds of labor. As a result, participation in the archaeological process generates other forms of expertise that include – but are not limited to – the traditional skills of excavation and interpretation. Maarten Horn's contribution emphasizes the domestic labor of setting up and running a camp in Qau, Egypt, offering novel opportunities to understand worker autonomy outside of the excavation context – and the inequalities to which workers were subject. Inequality, visible especially in unsafe working conditions, is key for Mónica Salas Landa's visual essay, which aims to make visible the skilled labor involved in the reconstruction of the Pyramid of the Niches in El Tajín, Mexico. For Germany, Elsbeth Bösl and Doris Gutsmiedl-Schümann take a broad approach that includes the lab-adjacent work of administration, to better understand the gendered dimensions of the work that archaeology entails. As Sarah Irving notes, however, women's labor was far from absent in the field; her analysis of early twentieth-century Palestine shows that archaeology was one among many kinds of work to which women had access.

Recognizing these divisions of labor, in turn, sheds light on varied forms of worker expertise and specialization. Yağmur Heffron and Filiz Tütüncü Çağlar illustrate how foreign archaeologists – past and present – have depended on the linguistic and cultural expertise of their national

7 Alexandra Hui, Lissa Roberts, and Seth Rockman, "Introduction: Launching a Labor History of Science," *Isis* 114, no. 4 (2023): 818, https://doi.org/10.1086/727646; see also Lissa Roberts, Seth Rockman, and Alexandra Hui, "Science and/as Work: An Introduction to This Special Issue," *History of Science* 61, no. 4 (2023): 439–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/00732753231206580.

8 Patrick Anthony et al., "(Un)Making Labor Invisible: A Syllabus," *History of Science* 61, no. 4 (2023): 618, https://doi.org/10.1177/00732753231180954.

9 Allison Mickel, *Why Those Who Shovel Are Silent: A History of Local Archaeological Knowledge and Labor* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2021).

10 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

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counterparts in Turkey, labor that typically goes unacknowledged. Francisco Díaz and Charlotte Williams show how the excavation and transportation of the monumental stelae from Piedras Negras, Guatemala, depended on workers' previous expertise in the mahogany and *chicle* industries. Jeffrey Kramer's analysis of the life of Kâni Barin explores how the expertise of an expedition foreman ranged from managing payroll to mending pots to building storage facilities. Archaeology, too, enabled new forms of worker specialization: Alberto Ortiz Brito demonstrates how experiences with archaeologists in Tres Zapotes, Mexico, were parlayed into other opportunities, like guiding, guarding, and handicraft production. Moving to the United States, Travis Corwin and Elliot Helmer show how commercial archaeologists' experience with organizing in the 1990s charts the way for a more just and inclusive discipline today. To better understand these varieties of specialization, and the diverse forms of expertise that workers bring to – and develop in – the field, our contributors develop new analytical approaches and apply them to an impressive range of published and unpublished sources.

The articles collected here also break new methodological ground in *how* we study archaeological labor, contrasting the official discourses of archaeologists, museums, universities, and states with new approaches and evidence. Chloé Rosner's fine-grained analysis of worker-related sources for Mandatory Palestine demonstrates how processes of archival composition, organization, and dispersal affect our ability to study labor in the past, while Irving addresses the challenges of recovering female workers' agency in Palestine through sources inflected by colonial, masculine, and Orientalizing gazes. Reading such sources against the grain is an ongoing challenge, but one that can be supplemented with other materials – especially photographs. Salas Landa's visual essay rereads photographs originally produced to document the excavation of El Tajín for signs of worker agency (and the inequalities to which they were subject), while Horn contrasts commercial postcards with official reports to emphasize Egyptian workers' autonomy and labor in setting up camp at Qau. The materiality of such visual sources is key for Corwin and Helmer, whose study of the zine format shows how this low-cost and easily-reproducible medium facilitated solidarity among geographically-dispersed commercial archaeologists in the United States.

Other contributors draw on (auto)ethnographic and biographical approaches to speak to the broader conditions of archaeological labor. Heffron and Tütüncü Çağlar link their own experiences with the invisible labor of intercultural interpretation with the complex intermediary role of Ottoman archaeologist Theodore Macridy Bey. Ortiz Brito's interviews document a range of work in archaeology, from excavating to guiding to guarding, in Tres Zapotes. Kramer pieces together diverse sources for his biography of Barin, which in turn speaks to the broader sociopolitical conditions under which people become archaeological workers. The relationships between such conditions and the practice of archaeology is also key for Díaz and Williams, who explore how workers' experience in extractive industries enabled them to become Indigenous archaeologists. In quite a different context, Bösl and Gutsmiedl-Schümann discuss changing patterns of women's participation in German archaeology, and their relationships with broader changes in politics and gender norms, since the nineteenth century.

Divisions of labor, expertise and specialization, and new methods are just a few of the many themes that cross-cut these papers. It is our hope that readers will experience this volume as a web, drawing connections between themes, sources of evidence, methodological approaches, and conclusions about archaeological labor across time and space. But it is not, of course, all-encompassing or definitive. This issue focuses primarily on regions with traditions of research in the history of archaeology: Southwest Asia, Egypt, Central America, North America, and Western Europe. The uneven treatment of different regions and time periods should provoke questions. For instance, how does archaeological labor function in Eastern Europe, South America, South Asia, East Asia, Australia, the Pacific islands, or in regions of Africa outside of Egypt? How has it changed over time elsewhere, and relative to what kinds of social, political, economic, and cultural conditions? To provoke these kinds of queries, we have also tried to arrange the contributions in this issue in an order that inspires camaraderie and comparison of scholarship. Moving forward or backward in this issue should enable the reader to build an itinerary, bringing discoveries and understandings that enrich and contextualize their next destination.

Heffron and Tütüncü Çağlar help to establish the tone and scope for the issue, setting it off with their article, "A Partnership of Unequals: Historicising Labour Relations between Local and

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Foreign Archaeologists in Türkiye through Ottoman Comparanda." The authors offer a long view of the history of archaeology, reflecting back on dynamics between Turkish and foreign archaeologists, beginning in the nineteenth century and drawing connections to the present day. They knit together archival evidence with personal reflection, making clear how labor in archaeology has not passed beyond the past and how the histories of transnational relations continue to shape the very individual experiences of young archaeologists in contexts like Turkey today.

We remain in Turkey with Kramer's "Digging Up Troy: The Workers of the University of Cincinnati Expedition to the Troad." Like Heffron and Tütüncü Çağlar, Kramer's article illustrates the importance of microhistory and individual life experience. He closely examines the story of Kâni Barin, who worked on the University of Cincinnati expedition to Troy for seven seasons and ultimately became a foreman. Kramer picks through Barin's story for its particularities as well as the broader generalizations it indicates about the experiences of archaeological workers at this time, in this place, under the circumstances of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey.

On the other hand, Bösl and Gutsmiedl-Schümann's "Breaking Ground: Women's Roles in German Archaeology Since the Nineteenth Century" again demonstrates the potential of taking the long view. Bösl and Gutsmiedl-Schümann cover in their analysis nearly 200 years of the history of women's involvement in archaeology in Germany. They track how the professionalization of archaeology contributed to the effacement of women's roles in archaeological knowledge production. Instead, as these authors revisit the nineteenth century, they locate the hands and minds of women all over the archaeological research process– from fieldwork to libraries to museums to publishing.

While focused on a different geographic area – namely, Palestine – Irving too invites a broad consideration of gendered labor in archaeology with her paper, "Gendering Labour in Palestinian Archaeology, 1890s–1930s." The time has come, Irving enjoins, to think beyond individual projects or archaeological sites, and to theorize about labor experiences more contextually, critically, and historically. Considering archaeological labor requires thinking not just about archaeology, but indeed, about *labor*, and so Irving considers the roles of women on archaeological projects in late Ottoman and Mandate period Palestine in light of other employment experiences, opportunities, and oppressions in the Levant at this time.

The political, social, and economic transitions during this time period in Palestine, recounted by Irving, remain relevant in the next article in our issue, Rosner's "Tracking Local Employees of the British Mandate Department of Antiquities in Palestine." Rosner explicitly seeks to extend Irving's work, demonstrating the sort of scholarly plaiting that we hoped this special issue would enable. Rosner offers her experience of navigating the archives of the Mandate Department of Antiquities, of teasing out the information that the archives were, at best, never meant to record and at worst, designed to eclipse. She offers methodological guidance for reading against such archives – a weft that carries through in the next article in this issue.

Horn's "Writing Archaeological Labor at Qau, Egypt in the 1920s" juxtaposes the contents of official archaeological documentation from a project run by the British School of Archaeology in Egypt with the informal postcards and photographs of field assistant James Leslie Starkey. Without romanticizing such ephemera, Horn points out how these spontaneous, unedited images and missives exhibit, but also subvert, Orientalist imaginaries. The formal report, Horn demonstrates, 'renders Egyptians ignorant, untrustworthy, and negligent.' The postcards, on the other hand, make it impossible to ignore the trust actually placed in the Egyptian workforce to expertly set up camp, launch the project, and even find new areas to excavate. This competence and leadership only comes through in the uncurated, undisciplined archive.

Even when workers appear in photos, their presence still can be 'underexposed,' to use Salas Landa's terminology. Her contribution, "Shedding Light on Labor: Photography, Archaeology, and the Making of Monumentality in Tajín, Mexico," carries this thread of the erasure of labor and demonstrates how to read for labor against the archive – but brings us across an ocean, to Mexico. Salas Landa looks deeply at the role of monumental reconstruction in post-revolutionary Mexico as well as the medium of photography, carefully considering how both of these contributed to a longstanding overshadowing of workers' contributions, risks, expertise, and experiences in the reconstruction of this icon of pre-Hispanic heritage. Like Horn and

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Rosner, she also offers a way to 'shed light,' to mitigate the underexposure, and to read the archive in revolutionary ways.

We remain in Mexico with Ortiz Brito's article, "Digging their Past: Archaeological Labor in Tres Zapotes, Veracruz, México," which offers a diachronic deep dive into the impact of archaeology on the political economy and cultural identity of a single village. He uses historical sources and ethnographic interviews to draw out how the initiation of archaeological activity – and the concomitant creation of a novel labor sector – shaped the residents' relationship to heritage, work, and their own identities. Ortiz Brito follows these questions through the twentieth century, as archaeological work continued and proliferated, as a museum was built and later renovated, and as tourism has accelerated in the area. All of this work, Ortiz Brito demonstrates, has contributed to the expansion of both expertise and self-identification with cultural heritage in Tres Zapotes.

Next in this issue, "Doing the Groundwork: Braiding Knowledges at Piedras Negras Guatemala (1930–1939)," invites the reader to continue thinking about how Latin American identities and political economies are entwined with archaeology by looking closely at a particular site – this time, a bit further south, in Guatemala. The authors, Díaz and Williams, echo Irving's provocation to consider archaeological labor in the context of other regional industries. In this case, Díaz and Williams point out how much infrastructure, machinery, and expertise involved in archaeological work came from the chicle and mahogany industries in the region. This incites a consideration of Indigenous workers as the protagonists of Maya archaeology at this site, as it was not only their physical contributions but also their knowledge of the landscape and fieldwork technology that enabled archaeology to proceed. The 'intellectual groundwork' of the project, Díaz and Williams argue, was laid by local Maya people.

We conclude the issue with Corwin and Helmer's piece, "*The Underground* Zine and the Labor Movement in 1990s Compliance Archaeology," depositing us as close as we will come to the present day and for us, the editors, home in the United States. Here, we hear punk music, we click through Yahoo! Groups message boards, and we pore through a zine called *The Underground*. Corwin and Helmer consider the affordances of the zine format for building possibilities for collective action among field technicians in US-based Cultural Resource Management (CRM). And though these sensory experiences of 1990s archaeology may feel nostalgic, as the zine archive is being digitized, Corwin and Helmer point out how relevant *The Underground*, as both an object and a text, is to the contemporary challenges and crises of CRM workers. The zine, and Corwin and Helmer's analysis, lay bare that like capitalism itself, the current state of dangerous, unregulated, and underpaid archaeological labor is not an immutable reality. A movement has been, and still is, possible.

Together, this collection provokes the question of what global labor solidarity in archaeology might look like. What conditions unite all of us who participate in archaeological fieldwork? What do we stand to gain, and what can we build, by recognizing shared experiences of injury, dehydration, exhaustion, confusion, and exclusion – past and present? What does the lab tech or the adjunct lecturer stand to gain by recognizing shared experiences with the locally-hired site worker or the undergraduate field school student? At the same time, what strategic possibilities might come from those who have experienced *less* harm and precarity standing up for those who have experienced more? How can those with relative privilege and stability elevate the concerns, cries, and collective action of marginalized and vulnerable contributors to archaeological knowledge? There are real challenges and barriers to formal unionization and a global movement for solidarity among those who engage in archaeological labor – such as language barriers, the seasonality of the work, a fragmented market, and archaeology's different position in disparate national and regional economies. There are also broader structural hurdles, like the persistence of racist, colonial, sexist, and other discriminatory logics, and the ways that global capitalism encourages individual aggrandizement over cross-class collectives. But our hope is that a collection like this will open up the possibility for recognizing what is both specific and shared about archaeological work through space and time, and for starting to ask not only how workers have made archaeology possible, but also how to make archaeology possible for workers.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors contributed equally to the writing of this introduction.

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