

## Indiana Jones and the “Jungle Puzzle” Cliché: Contrasting Depictions of Old World and Classical Archaeology

There has been a history now of scholarship confronting the “Romance” of archaeology and its attitude toward the outdated Orientalism view of the East and Egypt (Lydon and Rizvi 2010). For instance, Victorian Egyptomania ensured a continued fascination with Egyptian mummies and their burials beyond King Tut and into twentieth century film (Lant 1992). However, this paper suggests that one particular media cliché expands the role of the white, Western archaeologist versus a broader “Other” (Scorer 2011): the inevitable booby trap, jungle puzzle, or obstacle course. This cliché is inescapable in basically any media portrayal where archaeologists are really treasure-hunting action heroes. Indiana Jones must avoid booby traps in his very first ten minutes of introduction on screen in the jungles of Peru. Even the 2019 film “Dora and the Lost City of Gold,” while it is self-aware and attempts to correct past genre errors with the motto “we’re explorers, not treasure hunters,” a teenage Dora and her friends must confront multiple “jungle puzzles” also in Peru. Despite the fact that there is no real-world evidence of such deterrents in any archaeological context, this cliché continues.

However, jungle puzzles and traps never seem to appear in ancient Greece and Rome. Why, then, is this cliché so commonly applied Egypt, the New World, and the East, but not the traditional “classical world”? This paper addresses three aspects that contribute to this portrayal in popular Western media, which highlights a perceived superiority over indigenous, Non-Western characters and cultures: 1) Classics served as the foundation of Western European education, rendering its material and languages more familiar than more foreign cultures. Classical archaeology also has older predecessors in European art history and collecting (Biers 1992; Dyson 1998); 2) Toward the end of an age of European discovery, Western archaeologists

and institutions conducted excavations in foreign lands, at a time when local and indigenous archaeology often had not developed to the same extent (Dumont 2020; Lydon and Rizvi 2010); and finally, 3) these media characters and plots portray a lingering depiction of white intellectual superiority (Bernardi 2001). Local people may know about a ruin and its legend, but they are generally depicted as the guides and sidekicks of the protagonist, or even traitors, not the ones who solve the “jungle puzzle” and make the discovery. All three of these issues play a role in the portrayal of archaeologists in popular Western media and define a subtle difference between classical archaeology and other disciplines (Leventhal and Papadopoulos 2003; Dyson 1998).

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