

Keeping Field Schools #relevant: Material Culture as a Social Network

For several years, my colleagues and I have been bringing a few motivated minors into the field to excavate alongside college students, archaeological professionals, and project directors alike. Expanding the field school applicant pool to highly qualified high school students eases some of the pressures that archaeologists have discussed in pedagogical scholarship, such as the fiscal challenges faced by field schools resulting from decreased university funding (Baxter 2016; Connell 2012; Fagan 2006; and others); the diminishing attention paid to cultural issues (Fagan 2006); and the constant pressure to defend the relevance of archaeology to the academic world (Hamilakis 2004; Newman & West 2014). While the decision we made years ago to bring minors was not intended as a remedy to the current archaeological climate, we have come to see the benefits of expanding the scope of the field school—not just in terms of operations and goals, but also in terms of our student workers. This paper intends not to refute any of the well documented challenges that Classical archaeologists face in organizing field schools but rather to discuss how Western Iberia Archaeology (WIArch) utilizes an alternative pedagogical model that focuses not only on the research goals of an archaeological project but also on the experiential and transformative aspects of living and working in a foreign country.

This paper first defers to previously established field school models before moving to a comparison and discussion of WIArch's projects. It explores the various models of funding, such as external but private, often corporate funding to grant funding, adopted by field schools to conquer financial challenges (Boytner 2012). Yet WIArch's projects belong an emerging economy of field schools that promotes collaboration so that no single institution is responsible for the planning, teaching, funding, and reporting of the field school activities and archaeological findings. In creating opportunities for collaboration with students from secondary level

educational institutions, we generate project revenue and gain a sustainable applicant pool of students hungry for real-world, international learning experiences.

Beyond the obvious benefits of inter-institutional collaboration, this paper will explore how WIArch's model adds a new purpose to field schools. Tradition has dictated that field schools train future archaeologists while conducting active research, and recent attempts to keep field schools relevant have added emphasizing the importance of public projects and service, ethical concerns, and real world problem solving to their pedagogical vernacular (Carter 2014). But rather than inflate the field school experience with jargon, WIArch emancipates it, thereby opening a door to the personal realm. We embrace an alternative methodological approach that employs—perhaps even exploits—the social priorities of modern youth and makes archaeology more accessible and, therefore, relatable: a social network. WIArch's field schools frame the past as a new, untapped social network. Every fingerprint on a piece of pottery is a new connection with a person—a person whom we can question and get to know through material culture. This approach has resounding resonance with both our younger and our older students, because all can relate to our project goal: the emphasis on shared values, behaviors, and customs of the human experience. On WIArch projects, we do not only use the field school as a tool for teaching archaeology in action but also as a learning encounter, in which we transform our students' perceptions of the past, of material culture, and of themselves. In turn, this pedagogical perspective allows WIArch field schools to expanded their educational network to incorporate the personal, experiential, Classical, and experiential with the archaeological—because only the latter is not enough to stay #relevant.

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