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| Session ID | 7 |
| Session Title | Powerful artefacts in time and space |
| Start Time | Wed Dec 18 09:30:00 |
| Room | 822 |

Powerful artefacts, a category that often includes grave goods and monumental structures, take prime positions in archaeological research and literature. From popular films to museum displays, whether the Ark of the Covenant or the Sutton Hoo helmet, our views of artefacts influence both the primacy and direction of research, and interpretations for the public. Power in artefacts can be interpreted as having been economic, ritual or social in various ways. Through their component materials, their form, their places of origin and of deposition, and sometimes their curation in the case of demonstrably old objects, archaeologists build hierarchies of power relationships. Certain objects evoke a greater sense of importance than others. This session aims to be wide-ranging and to tease out these manifestations of power, and to challenge our interpretive frameworks. We invite papers from all periods that focus on artefacts and interpretations of power in the past. Power may relate to the individual artefact, to the person with whom it is associated, or to society as a whole; or more broadly as in social-religious and/or supernatural power. Papers may also focus on the extent of power in an artefact, and to what extent it is contagious or transferable.

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| 9:30 | Liv Nilsson Stutz, Linnaeus University, Sweden | The Power of the Illicit. The Memory and Identity Captured and Maintained in the Illicit Objects in the Ravensbrück Prison Camp | <p>This paper explores the power embodied in small items produced and used within the Ravensbrück prison camp. The point of departure are objects collected art historian Zygmund Lacocinski from former prisoners when they arrived with the International Red Cross buses to Sweden after WWII, supplemented by interviews with the prisoners about the production, use and significance of the objects within the camp.</p> <p>The paper will focus on the transformative power embodied in these illicitly produced and used small items, and will discuss how small illicit objects can be actively called upon to affect the daily lives of people, in this case incarcerated in an extremely controlled environment, to support a sense of self among people whose humanity depend on them.</p> <p>Through the embodied engagement with the materiality of these things – through production, exchange and use - the prisoners made connections to a past that had been taken away, and therefore must be materialized over and over again to maintain reality. The paper will present how the physical engagement with them affected not only the mindset of the women who engaged with them, but also created emotional states that in turn would trigger further associations and experiences – transforming these traces into active agents in the creation and recreation of personhood and humanity in the prisoners, through acts of resistance and solidarity. The power encapsulated in these objects is thus one of subversion, and is enmeshed with informal and alternative hierarchies, and resistance under abject circumstances.</p> |
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| 9:50 | David Bell, Queen's University; Caroline McGrath, Queen's University Belfast | Irish Bronze Age Cinerary Urns: A Reevaluation | <p>Around 2500BC, settlers from continental Europe introduced the Beaker culture to Britain and Ireland. New burial traditions included crouched interment, often with rich assemblages of manufactured grave goods including gold ornaments, copper tools and weapons as well as distinctive ceramic vessels. Further advances in metalworking, particularly the development of more effective copper alloy implements, would herald the eponymous Bronze Age (c.2200BC). This early industrial revolution is generally believed to have produced more stratified and warlike societies.</p> <p>There was also an increase in burials, particularly in Ireland and northern Britain, where large inverted urns were placed over cremated human remains. Possibly denoting Iberian and, ultimately, Near Eastern anthropomorphic influences, the motifs frequently used to decorate these artefacts might be reduced to a few core elements; vertical zig-zags or herringbones, horizontal bands and horizontal triangles. Respectively, these appear to represent human hair, pelvic girdles and pubic triangles which would relate to female deities responsible for reproduction and regeneration. Similar decoration appears on a wide variety of ceramic ware and metal goods.</p> <p>Far from living in societies dominated by male warrior elites constantly engaged in conflict and violence, as is commonly supposed, the available evidence suggests that the people of the Bronze Age were much more concerned with the celebration of fertility and rebirth.</p> |
| 10:10 | Rachel Cartwright, University of Minnesota | Brooching Power in the Viking Age | <p>Brooches, while serving a functional purpose, are often used and interpreted as a means of messaging. Often the messages being sent are about identity, whether that be about status, group affiliation, or another form. The oval brooches prevalent in Viking Age female dress have long been interpreted in such a way, with their presence in a burial indicating a Norse identity and a probable high status. While oval brooches are one of the most common types found in Viking Age graves, the variation in quality and quantity within burials indicates that they held significant meaning. In particular the brooches with attachments, such as keys, can be interpreted as power of the wearer within their family. This paper will examine the archaeological and literary evidence regarding oval brooches and their use as a signifier of power within a socially stratified society. Not only will their meaning in the past be theorized about, but also their interpretations in the present, gleaned both from archaeological literature and museum contexts.</p> |
| 10:30 | Matthew G. Knight, National Museums Scotland | The Destruction of Power and the Power of Destruction: Decommissioning Powerful Artefacts in Bronze Age Britain | <p>Powerful objects indicate the wealth and status of the prehistoric individuals and communities to whom they belonged and the social situations in which they circulated. We might infer this from various object characteristics, including form, materiality, craftsmanship and presumed function, as well as the careful treatment of these objects during deposition. But what about when we encounter conventionally powerful objects that have been decommissioned prior to deposition? Does the removal of the functionality of an object remove its power? And more importantly what does this tell us about the people behind the destructive acts and their changing relationships with these objects over time? The paper will present conventionally 'powerful' Bronze Age artefacts from across Britain, including axes, swords, shields and gold objects, that have been manipulated and/or destroyed prior to deposition to explore these questions. It will be demonstrated that we can identify multiple occasions where the destruction of specific objects was intrinsically linked to social concepts of power.</p> |
| 10:50 | Tânia Casimiro, IHC-NOVA University of Lisbon; António Marques, Centro de Arqueologia de Lisboa | The Lisbon Devil: A Powerful Artefact in Portuguese Middle Ages | <p>Archaeological excavations made in the Mouraria area discovered archaeological contexts dated between the late 12th and mid 15th centuries. Several domestic environments reveal the presence of Muslim and Christian communities based on material culture and faunal remains. Among the many finds related to everyday household activities a ceramic mould was found. This object was used to cast metal figurines shaped as little devils. Its physical characteristics combining a human figure with animal legs, horns and a phallus clearly suggest this identification.</p> <p>This paper aims to present that figurine as a representation of occult activities, such as the calling of demons, associated to an atmosphere of popular superstition. The existence of one mould destined to cast several figures leads to the conclusion that this was not an isolated act but a widespread practice. Several documents seem to confirm that the worship of demons and other pagan rituals were frequent.</p> |
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| 11:40 Misha Enayat, University of Southampton | Hierarchies of Value? A Reassessment of Exotic and Indigenous Feasting Artefacts from Iron Age Britain | <p>'Exotic' or 'luxury' items (typically imported or otherwise rare) are conventionally recognised for their important roles in feasting events: arenas where political and social power is negotiated. Within studies of Late Iron Age Britain, consideration of the roles of material culture implicated within feasting events extends to pottery and plant foods, but is largely limited to Roman and Belgic servingware, imported plants, and Roman amphorae and their contents.</p> <p>This paper intends to expand upon current theories of feasting and power by considering the associated material culture, including indigenous artefacts, in order to reframe the role of luxury items in Iron Age feasting contexts and to consider possible roles of indigenous material. It has been argued that the limited quantities of recovered wine amphorae were probably insufficient to have supported indigenous leaders' political feasts, which likely relied more commonly upon indigenous beer instead. Could the same hold for pottery imports? How do we understand from where feasting-related artefacts derived their value? Was their supposed power inherent, did it exist only by association, through their inclusion in practices intended to negotiate or maintain power, or were they largely passive indicators of status and hierarchy?</p> <p>It is hoped that the above explorations will result in an understanding of how the traditional focus in archaeological research upon 'unusual' items alters impressions of the extents of their usage, discussion of the potential power associated with more local or quotidian objects, and a reassessment of the appropriateness of current feasting frameworks to the British Iron Age.</p> |
| 12:00 Ellen Finn, Trinity College Dublin | Making Manuports: Unmanufactured Artefacts in Archaeological Interpretation | <p>Defined as 'an artefact or natural object that is transported, but not necessarily modified, and deposited by humans' (Kipfer 2000, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology), manuports offer us an opportunity to reconsider the power of manufacture in archaeological interpretations of the material record. Manuports are 'made' through human action, yet not through the processes of manufacture or physical modification we usually associate with production. Rather, they are changed through their conscious movement from one place to another, a process which in turn enacts a conceptual transition between (our) ontological categories of 'natural' and 'artificial'.</p> <p>Through reference to the pebbles excavated at the peak sanctuaries of Bronze Age Crete, it will be demonstrated that in many cases, manuports have not been interpreted as powerful artefacts, or, indeed, artefacts at all. Manuports' lack of manufacture may be seen to have contributed to their exclusion from both definitions of 'artefact' and archaeological excavation and interpretation. This marginalisation is compounded by the practical and interpretative complexities in recognising their unmodified forms within the material record, frequently overlooked in favour of crafted items which might conform more comfortably with traditional understandings of 'material culture'.</p> <p>In recognising this particular archaeological hierarchisation, this paper will begin to illustrate the very many ways in which 'artefacts' are brought into being without physical modification or manufacture, highlighting the diversity in human perspectives and prompting a reconsideration of the implications of archaeological terminology, practice and interpretation.</p> |

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| 12:20 | Pallavee Gokhale, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune | Attribute OR Artefact OR Attribute of Intangible Artefacts – A Case of Indus (Harappan) Script | <p>Attributes describe artefacts. Physical attributes help us explain the inherent properties of the object whereas contextual properties contribute in explaining it's acquired meaning. However, certain attributes acquire more significance than the artefact itself. The entire analysis then revolves around explaining the attribute with it's range of values seen on artefacts. Even if the artefact types vary, the perceived value of the attribute is so high that the studies undermine underlying variations in artefact types, other inherent attributes, their spatio-temporal context, and their possible diverse cultural values in contemporary societies (overarching context). The attribute takes over becoming a virtual artefact itself and dominates the academic research in space and time.</p> <p>The case of Indus/ Harappan (2600-1900 BCE - mature phase) signs is one such prominent example. The void of any bi-scriptual material or references from other contemporary cultures (except contentious reference of Meluhha) has awarded complete freedom for the analysis and it's interpretations over decades. This has also showcased presentist views while comparing the iconographies to current religious ideologies, yoga practice, interpreting the signs as words/ meanings as those from existing group of languages and even commenting about the literacy of the Indus society. The statistical and linguistic studies of these signs have provided many observations till date but as mentioned earlier, these are devoid of overarching context in majority of the cases. In fact the extremes of academic opinions range from signs representing words from dravidian language (Rao, 2011) vis-a-vis signs 'not even evolving in linguistic directions after at least 600 years of use' (Farmer et al, 2004). The types of artefacts bearing these signs and their overarching context probably has much to contribute to our understanding of these signs and their usage pattern. The present paper analyses these various contexts and possibilities of interpretation by considering signs are powerful attribute rather than artefact in space and time.</p> |
| 12:40 | Natalia Moragas Segura, University of Barcelona; Manuel Jesús González, Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo (Mexico) | This is not Prehispanic!!!! The Persistence of Archaeological Objects and Power Discourses in the Mass-Media | <p>Undoubtedly Mesoamerican archeology has greatly contributed to the creation of narratives for novels, adventure movies and more recently, science fiction series and videogames. Mesoamerican archeology has some particular elements that make it a source of inspiration, more or less fortunate, for the massmedia. In the beginning, a large part of the archaeological excavations was carried out by researchers from Europe and the USA. Consequently, a mysterious, exotic and strange imagery of these cultures are developed very soon. On the one hand, for digging in distant lands very different from the European countries and the United States and secondly by the existence of pyramids (which excite popular imagery) and archaeological objects of great symbolic significance.</p> <p>Despite the efforts made to offer a much more everyday image of these Mesoamerican peoples, the weight of the image and the object in politics, official communications and artistic-cultural representations constitute a challenge between Academy and society. Currently, the social media reinforce discourses closer to the perspective of the nineteenth century thought than to a critical thinking of the twenty-first century. Always, the same images and objects are repeated and retweeted automatically. Before to suggest new proposals, we need to identify and understand the use and symbolism of these objects more related to contemporary social behaviors than historical knowledge.</p> |
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