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# **ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS**

**MULTIPLE IMPACTS,  
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Edited by Nathan Schlanger  
and Kenneth Aitchison

## 13. Postscript: on dead canaries, guinea-pigs and other Trojan horses

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Archaeologists, it was recalled at the onset of this volume, are professionally quite familiar with the numerous crises and disasters to have struck humanity in the course of its history. Let us then imagine that the current economic crisis is akin to some medieval plague or such pandemic, and wonder what, *mutatis mutandis*, would be the patterns and processes that afflicts the archaeological profession and its practitioners, and with them archaeological research and heritage management more generally? Does the outbreak strike indiscriminately, left and right, or are there factors that encourage or hinder its spread? Are all victims similarly affected, or do some prove more vulnerable or resilient than others? What of incubation periods, delayed reactions, recurrent fevers? And once the malady over, are the prospects of full recovery everywhere equal in their scale and timing? Will the convalescents face sequels, parasites, secondary infections, or will they be tempered and strengthened by the ordeal? Last but not least, will they be able to find their place and flourish, to regain – and indeed to renew or actually to reinvent – their patrimonial and scientific vocation as well as their wider relevance to society at large?

There is of course no question of proposing upon this medical metaphor anything like a complete or formal diagnosis. The scenarios or conjectures tentatively advanced here – of which some will no doubt (it is hoped) prove overly pessimistic – can likewise hardly count as a reliable prognosis, and even less as possible remedies. For one, the crisis as a syndrome and a collective representation is still very much with us, with changing intensities, multiple scales, mixed signals, double dips and side effects that are all superimposed and at times enmeshed within other ongoing social, economic and political processes. Next, we are all well aware that the initial conditions for archaeological research and heritage management vary considerably from country to country, let alone between continents, in the light of different traditions of governance, ideological predispositions, economic patterns, planning procedures, legislative frameworks, monitoring practices, academic norms, professional standards, social expectations and the like (see some recent overviews in Bozoki-Ernyey 2007, D’Andrea & Guermandi 2008, Demoule 2007, Kristiansen 2009, Ould Mohamed Naffé et al. 2008, Willems & Van den Dries 2007). Lastly, at quite a different level, the information available to us on the effects of the crisis is at best incomplete. The contributors have not all been equally attentive to the identified impact-areas, and the data accessible to them have been variable. In comparison with the information available for the United Kingdom (on employment and higher education), for Russia, Ireland or Spain (on archaeological permits and structures) and especially for the Netherlands (on just about everything), it is clear that in other countries ministries, state agencies or independent bodies have much to catch up in terms of gathering and making available relevant information. Upon all this, this postscript can really do little more than draw on the contributions assembled here to propose some comparisons and provoke some reflections on the multiple impacts of the crisis on archaeology.

## 1 Employment in crisis: canaries and guinea-pigs

The area where the pattern appears most contrasted is undoubtedly that of employment in what we have called Malta archaeology. The westernmost fringes of Europe, specifically the United Kingdom and to a different degree Ireland, have been the hardest hit. The reduction of developers' demand for archaeological work in the United Kingdom has not only lead several commercial units to the brink of bankruptcy – hence the pertinent advice reproduced here in annex II – but also left several hundred archaeologists out of job, from early on and across the board (Aitchison, Sinclair, Thomas, this volume). Indeed so distinctive has been this syndrome that archaeologists there have unwittingly gained another, unwelcome claim to fame. Alongside the 'Lipstick index', whereby the increased purchase of cheap 'feel-good' cosmetics compensates for now unaffordable shoes or clothes, economists have introduced the 'Archaeology index' for spotting a recession. Geoffrey Dicks, analyst at the Royal Bank of Scotland (an institution, incidentally, whose own contribution to the financial crisis is notorious) explained to the Mail on Sunday (18.05.2008, see [http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/investing-and-markets/article.html?in\\_article\\_id=441790&in\\_page\\_id=3](http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/investing-and-markets/article.html?in_article_id=441790&in_page_id=3)): "One unusual indicator of an economic slowdown is the employment, or otherwise, of archaeologists. When new ground is broken for a building development, the archaeologists are usually allowed in first, to rescue any important fragments. With little new ground being broken, demand for archaeologists is falling". Falling so fast and hard that a BBC item entitled 'recession leaves history in the dark' (20.02.2009, see [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/7899938.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/england/7899938.stm)) had no qualms to dub archaeology "a 'canary' trade, one which – like the canaries warning of dangerous gas in mining history – dies at the first sign of trouble in the air".

This noxious state of affairs is to a certain extent reproduced in Ireland, where, admittedly in conjunction with other factors<sup>1</sup>, the number of archaeologists employed in the commercial sector has fallen by an astounding 80% since 2007 (Eogan, this volume). The trend is also perceptible in the United States, where by 2009 job positions deemed non-essential have been by and large eliminated from cultural resource management consultants, and also from state agencies, including universities, museums and parks (Altschul, this volume). Such painful contractions appear however relatively localised, and relate to the distinctive organisation, scale and employment practices of the archaeological business in the countries concerned. Although reliable data are not yet available, also Spain can expect a rise in archaeological redundancies and bankruptcies given the near-collapse of the particularly overheated construction sector (Parga-Dans, this volume). There are nevertheless indications that the regional governments, with their public-works developments and their budgetary time-scales, will provide a sufficient buffer for commercial archaeological companies. Otherwise complex is the situation in Poland, where the effects of the global crisis have actually been quite mild, and further mitigated by the influx of EU funding for major infrastructure programmes (Marciniak & Pawleta, this volume). Nevertheless, structural flaws in the current archaeological management system encourage the proliferation of small commercial firms which cannot ensure stable and rewarding employment for many Polish archaeologists, including those returning back home from dwindling opportunities .... in Ireland and the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, while a couple of companies have ceased trading, it seems for various structural

reasons that archaeology is set to remain a growing sector with viable employment prospects (van den Dries, Waugh & Bakker, this volume). Employment also appears to be less of an issue in many other countries, notably those with long-term or specifically launched infrastructural investments, such as, in this volume, Russia or France.

In France too, as it happens, archaeologists and their employment have been spotlighted by the crisis – not however as canaries, harbinger to the recession, but rather as guinea-pigs, testing out a brand new form of employment contract. To the existing two types of public sector contracts (permanent and short-term) has been added an ‘activity’ contract, whose duration – an innovation for the public sector – follows that of the operation or project to which the employee is assigned, and can therefore be extended (up to five years) but also terminated (within a fortnight or so) in function of this unfolding project (see Schlanger & Salas Rossenbach, this volume). This experimental contract was introduced within the relaunch ‘acceleration’ laws, on the premise that the projected infrastructure developments will generate further archaeological work, and that this more flexible, off-ceiling mode of employment will enhance the reactivity and reduce the delays of the main public operator, INRAP. Whatever the case, this new ‘activity’ contract is set to be generalised after its archaeological trial-testing across the French public sector, which is currently being reformed and modernised as we know.

## 2 Economies of / in knowledge?

Job losses due to the global economic crisis (or rather to the different propensities of the systems afflicted) are of course hard to bear at an individual level. Of greater concern to us however are the overwhelmingly negative repercussions of these losses on the profession as a whole, including the practice, standards and aims of archaeological research and heritage management.

To begin with, those made redundant include a number of fairly specialised archaeologists – be they experts in phytolith analysis, in aerial photography interpretation, or in late samian terra sigillata – whose full employment (as well as the full deployment and productivity of their knowledge) depends on a certain scale and turnover of data-generating archaeological activities. If dispensed with, their hard-earned expertise will prove difficult if not impossible to recover: it will in any case barely be compensated by the admittedly cheaper expedient of dispatching plastic bags or soil samples to some ‘cottage-industry’ experts, often isolated, far from relevant reference collections and without much time and incentive for research and publications. At the other end of the scale, there may well be a similar price to pay for the cohorts of field-workers and technicians shed by archaeological operators. Unless adequate measures are taken, there is a risk that with them will also go a range of practical know-how and tacit knowledge – be it in terms of operational nous for on-site interventions, or with regards to desk-based and post-excavation skills such as small finds handling and inventories. Standardised context-sheets and computerised recording systems are well and good, but we all know how indispensable it is to maintain some concerted personal implication all along the archaeological process, from the initial evaluation and research design, through data-recovery, analysis and interpretation, to publication, conservation and public outreach.

Together with that, also those who remain in employment will not be left unscathed by the multiple impacts of the crisis. Again, increased workloads or worsened employment conditions are not the prime issue here, as much as the likely changes, however insidious or imperceptible at first, in the very conception of archaeology as a profession and as a vocation. In France, for example, the newly introduced ‘activity’ contract risks contributing to the further fragmentation of the archaeological process. Apart from mandatory site reports, beneficiaries of such contracts will have little opportunities for research or training, let alone publications, exhibitions and the like. Similarly, the restriction of these new contracts to the excavations phase will correspondingly channel other contract-holders towards diagnostic operations. The scientific and logistical costs resulting from this segmentation will satisfy no one, except perhaps those bent on confining the public operator to the less rewarding role of diagnosticians so as to fully ‘free’ excavations for the commercial market. Still, whether these particular risks materialise or not, the situation is probably worst under systems where the conception of Malta archaeology as a public service is de facto overrun by the self-regulating competitive model (see Demoule this volume). Since this competition is quintessentially played out in the financial fields of costs and profits, it is quite clear that – unless steps are proactively taken to counter this – any crisis-induced reductions in time and resources will only mean further concessions on the quality of the work undertaken, its contribution to knowledge and its benefit to society.

A marked decline in the quality of Malta archaeology is already perceptible in Poland (Marciniak & Pawleta, this volume): due to tighter delays and smaller tenders, less analyses are being commissioned, archaeological documentation is produced to lower standards and occasionally also fiddled with, while post-excavation studies and publications are left to dwindle. Admittedly, the situation there is exacerbated by the current failure of controlling provisions, but similar concerns over quality maintenance are expressed in other countries, be it in Russia, with the rise of tax-aided private operators and the reduction in the numbers of reports produced (Engovatova, this volume), in France, where ‘accelerated’ delays for completing excavations may well incite some operators to last-ditch compromises (Schlanger & Salas Rossenbach, this volume), and also in Hungary, where the devolution of preventive excavations from the abruptly dissolved state operator to the regional museums will also impact on the quality of the work produced (Bánffy & Raczky, this volume). It might be worth recalling at this juncture that high quality work, that is work that represents real value for money in the full sense of the term and for all concerned, is not only in the professional interest of all practicing archaeologists, but also part of their deontological commitments. The European Association of Archaeologists’ ‘Principles of conduct for archaeologists involved in contract archaeological work’, for example, specifically call on archaeologists to ensure that they understand their roles and responsibilities, that they only undertake work for which they and their organisations are suitably equipped, staffed or experienced, that they adhere to relevant laws and ethical standards regarding competition between archaeological organisations, and indeed that they resist the tendency of the contract system towards fragmentation and act to maintain the academic coherence of archaeology (see inter alia articles 3, 5, 8, 11 of the EAA Principles of conduct, <http://www.e-a-a.org/eaacodes.htm>).

This last point leads us to a further impact area of the crisis – relating to archaeology in research institutions and universities. As in previous cases, the issue here is not simply that academic and Malta archaeologies are increasingly drift-

ing apart, or that masses of fieldwork data become so rapidly worthless for lack of proper analysis and publications. To be sure, these longstanding problems are exacerbated by the current recession, as when cash-strapped operators are increasingly tempted to skip or trim down costly publications which their clients neither read nor value, or when employees in heritage management institutions are permitted to pursue their teaching and research activities only at their own expense and time. The novelty this time is that the troubles span established divides, so that also the once 'poor but care-free' academics now end up poorer and downright miserable too. In its current version, the 'knowledge economy' is wont to be economical with its vocation, placing practical relevance and marketable success on par with the advancement of learning for the common good, and it is also summoned to economise on its essential undertakings of knowledge production and skill transmission. The practical renditions of these trends in archaeology are bound to be variable, and often delayed or diffused (see Schlanger 2010). In several countries the university and research sectors seem as yet unaffected by the recession, and in some instances student numbers are stable or growing – even if the rise is predicted to be temporary, pending increased tuition fees and decreasing employment prospects. In the United States, alongside an injection in research funding, several departments and museums have already reduced staff, mirroring the worrying decline in public education. Across the Atlantic, the imminent cuts in the United Kingdom promise to be of unprecedented severity for higher education and research (Sinclair, this volume). Quite revealing in this respect is the quandary facing university based archaeological units. While some continue to successfully combine profit- and knowledge-making, others falter between Scylla and Charybdis: with the crisis, their standards of research and publication proves to be a financial handicap in the ruthless commercial market, but still fail to become a scientific asset for the ever more stringent criteria of university recognition and research assessment outputs. Meanwhile in the universities themselves, social and political pressures are mounting to teach useful things, including vocational or at least transferable skills. Logistical and managerial proficiencies in Malta archaeology are particularly in demand, even though, ironically enough, few university lecturers have actually any first hand experience of them – just as, for the matter, most directors of commercial units have only a faint recollection of what academic research is really all about.

### **3 The state gives and taketh – investments, legislations and a Faustian bargain**

Much has been said on the state and its roles in the context of this global crisis, on John Maynard Keynes and his legacy, on the need to see a visible hand extended to intervene, to spend, to stimulate and kick start the economy back on track. There are of course also voices raising legitimate concerns over excessive spending and borrowing, giving precedence to austerity measures, cuts and deficit reductions – a depressive urge recently likened to some ritual sacrifice to pacify the gods of mammon (see <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/20/opinion/20krugman.html>). Be it as it may, so far as archaeology is concerned all indications (notably those gathered in this volume) concur that the discipline, its practitioners and its goals fare rather better when states invest in infrastructures and developments. Some of these investments have long been programmed and budgeted for, such as those related to the



2012 European football championship in Poland and Ukraine, or the 2014 winter Olympics in Russia. In other cases, in France, the Netherlands or Spain, infrastructure programmes have been specifically advanced and upgraded to help relaunch the economy, leading also to greater demands for archaeological evaluations and excavations, and ultimately to more knowledge and public benefits. Contrariwise, delays in the implementation of the Transportation bill in the United States, or the recent cuts in the Department of Transport budget in the United Kingdom, already have or are likely to have direct negative impacts on archaeology. This role of the state is of course nothing new: with their massive scale and long-term planning, centralised public works initiatives have been for over a century the motor of archaeological heritage management worldwide, including the first and second Aswan dams, the New Economic Plan in the Soviet Union, the Dutch Polders, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Mississippi Missouri River basin programme, to name but a few early landmarks (see Engovatova this volume, Brew 1961, Schlanger 2008, Demoule 2007 and references within).

What is however probably new and highly symptomatic of our current crisis is the fact that these encouragements and investment in infrastructure developments are accompanied by various legal modifications, regulations and organisational changes which, de facto, amount to a regression in the capacity of the state to exercise its regulatory functions. Either piecemeal or by design, the state's obligations to ensure adequate measures for monitoring and protecting the archaeological heritage under threat appear to be diluting or melting down in the blaze of the crisis – as a reminder, confer again the preamble, articles 2, 3, 5 etc, of the Malta 1992 European Convention for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Archeologie/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Archeologie/default_en.asp)). And while we are at it, see also the Florence 2000 European Landscape Convention ([http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/landscape/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/landscape/default_en.asp)) and the Faroe 2005 Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm>).

Several such cases of such legal and institutional tinkering have been reported by the contributors to this volume. In Hungary, a proposed change in the legal definition of an archaeological site (which would effectively apply to and protect only a fraction of known archaeological occurrences) was meant to favour developers and investors in times of crisis. In the meantime, the outright dissolution of the Field service for cultural heritage by the newly elected right-wing government seems to put this initiative on hold. In Russia, various tax rebates have been proposed in time of crisis: these benefit private archaeological companies to the detriment of public operators such as universities and museums. Moreover, attempts are being made at the State parliament to curtail the law on cultural heritage sites, so as dispense altogether with the obligation to undertake archaeological evaluations on land scheduled for development. In Poland, a law passed in September 2008 (just before the crisis, then) requires that decisions on the location of highways be already linked to permission for their construction – a speeding up measure that reduces dramatically the time available for undertaking archaeological surveys and preventive excavations of any quality, in between the initial planning and beginning of construction itself.

Granted that each has their specific antecedents and dynamics, such instances of disengagement may be related to straightforward financial considerations over short term money making or saving, but also to some ideological repositioning regarding the role and responsibilities of the state. In the United Kingdom today, it



is rather the former motivation that dominates. The conservative-led government in place since May 2010 has already turned to cut funding for English Heritage, the national agency for the historic environment, and also initiated a review of its role and remit which could lead to its merger with other commissions and conservation bodies. Also at local government level funding is expected to be slashed, directly threatening posts of archaeological advisors and curators, and with them the provision of proper archaeological protection and management. In France, on the other hand, rather more than mere economies are at stakes: it almost seems as if a Faustian bargain is being pressed, whereby more resources and opportunities are made available provided that delays are shortened, operations accelerated, procedures lightened, controls lessened, compromises accepted, and more broadly that some curbs are put on the 'henceforth excessive influence' of preventive archaeology – or for the matter that of state architects regarding classified urban zones, or of environmental protection agencies regarding polluting installations. Some of the modifications recently enacted in France in these domains have really to do with the streamlining reforms of public policies being undertaken by the government in place. Both the crisis and the relaunch plan are sometimes expediently used as a smokescreen, a red herring, a Trojan horse to legislate measures that have not sufficiently benefited from political scrutiny and public debate, let alone from proper well informed analysis with regards to their efficiency and effects. In their neophytic neoliberal zeal to belittle rules and reduce state employment, some parliamentarians and administrators seem to behave as if heritage, history and culture had nothing to do with the identity and consolidation of the French nation-state, or, to give what might be a more clinching argument, as if heritage, history and culture were not the prime reason why over 50 million tourists chose to pass by every year, even in times of crisis.

#### **4 Some concluding thoughts**

To find in it a silver lining, the crisis has enabled us to hone somewhat our critical numerical skills, with all these whopping sums and figures so casually bandied about. Let us then recall that in countries such as France or the United Kingdom the yearly cost of reconciling the needs of scientific research, heritage and development – the cost of making Malta archaeology – is somewhere around 160 or 180 million Euros. This, we now know, is really but a mere fleck of dust in view of the budgets made available for stimulated infrastructure packages, or indeed when compared with the revenues already accumulated by some of our freshly bailed-out or nationalised banks. In the same vein, this sum probably amounts to a couple of boardrooms' worth of fat-cat salaries, inclusive of welcome shares and golden handshakes, or a couple of star-studded football teams with the reserves included, to say nothing of a couple of bomb-laden Rafale combat jets – or indeed, to everyone their lame ducks, Eurofighters. More seriously, to venture a genuine solution for the years to come, the cost of archaeological research and heritage management in developed countries may well approximate something like 3 Pounds or 4 Euros per citizen per annum – the price of a tip that seems rather well worth paying for the nation state to take in hand its archaeological responsibilities for the common good.

This is of course a matter of choices, commitments and priorities, which call for social and political goodwill well beyond the confines of the discipline. The underlying standpoint behind this proposal is admittedly at odds with the trend,

initiated in Anglo-Saxon countries and until recently widely emulated, to have the cost of Malta archaeology spared from the public purse and shifted instead onto the unlucky developers, compelled to seek the provision of commercial archaeological services to satisfy planning permissions. This version of the ‘polluter-payer’ principle and its archaeological application could do with some reassessment in times of crisis. With regards to social and economic realities, it seems even more counterproductive now than ever to hamper or prohibit development plans only because their genuinely cash-strapped developers cannot afford the extra costs on behalf of the community as a whole. As for archaeological research and heritage management, the ambivalence and vulnerability of this model, despite its genuine qualities, becomes more apparent with regards to employment fluctuations, skills generation and maintenance, scientific outputs and public benefits. Among other things, it will be worth ensuring that the various voluntary codes and quality standards formulated under the market approach are not only adhered to by the practitioners concerned, but also that they gain sufficient weight and recognition out there, in the cutthroat world of commercial competition. Similarly for the state model (Demoule this volume, Kristiansen 2009) it will be necessary to reconsider the conditions that need to prevail for the state to adequately guarantee the scientific quality and public benefits of archaeology. The challenge is not simply to have the state follow Keynesian policies in times of crisis, so as to give a helping hand, directly or indirectly, to archaeology – it is also to ensure that the state retains its responsibilities and its role also in times of calm and prosperity.

A medieval plague, then, a litmus test, a prism, a Trojan horse as well, the global economic crisis as encountered all through the pages of this volume may yet prove to be also a source of introspection and even optimism. In the Netherlands, for example, the devolution of the implementation of the Malta Convention to local and municipal levels seems to be taken seriously and undertaken efficiently – setting a model for other countries where ‘decentralisation’ usually means the dumping of increased responsibilities on cash strapped and distracted local levels. Likewise in Ireland, prospects seem fairly bright for further collaborations between the academic and the commercial sectors in accessing and exploiting the archaeological data and heritage potential accumulated during the Celtic Tiger years. Paradoxically, and yet perfectly in tune with their own aims and principles, some contributors find consolation in the fact that the crisis has slowed down building works and contributed to the long-term *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains – others, with equal pertinence and sincerity, draw comfort from the fact that the crisis has necessitated stimulus packages which provide more opportunities for research and heritage enhancement. Whatever the case, since archaeology has been a canary trade, marking the onset of gloom, can we not expect and will it to be also a swallow heralding the springtime of recovery? After all, beyond economics, we have accumulated here and elsewhere enough indications to argue that archaeology is also a reliable indicator of cultural and social well being, reflected in the ways communities and stakeholders consider that the heritage of the past is a relevant asset, a source of knowledge and an opportunity for the future.

## Notes

1. The exceptional job losses in Ireland need to be understood (as Eogan this volume explains) in the light of the major developments of the past 15 years, when the 'Celtic Tiger' economy undertook a long overdue upgrade of its communication and industrial infrastructures. Regardless of the crisis, the archaeology sector in Ireland was bound to regain more normal dimensions.

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