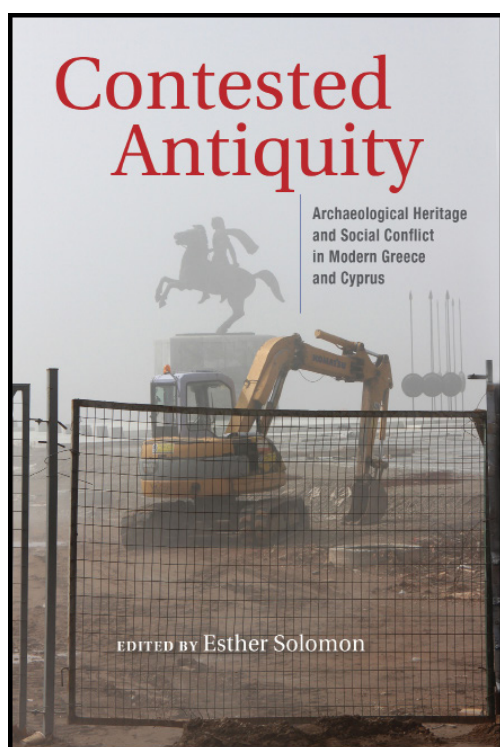


BOOK REVIEW

## Remnants of an On-Going Clash. Review of: *Contested Antiquity. Archaeological Heritage and Social Conflict in Modern Greece and Cyprus.* Edited by Esther Solomon (2021), Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

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In the last two decades or so, the material heritage and the archaeology of Greece have attracted a significant body of work, questioning the constitution of the field, its political-genealogical links, and its role in the on-going negotiations of national and other identities. More recently, the articulation of nationalism with colonialism, especially within the framework of crypto-colonization (Herzfeld 2002), has become a focus of reflection within such debates (e.g. Hamilakis 2008; Papadopoulos 2016; Greenberg and Hamilakis 2022), while new theoretical spaces, with most prominent being archaeological ethnography, have led to a plethora of empirical and field investigations and interventions (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009; Hamilakis 2011; Lekakis and Pantzou 2021; Anagnostopoulos *et al.* 2022). While national-cum-colonial archaeology, operating within an increasingly neoliberal framework, is still the norm, these are signs of hope. Scholarly and public discussions on such matters have

managed to bypass both the sclerosis of conventional academic and archaeological establishment, and the lack of well-funded fora for these debates such as critical journals; they have invented new forms of communication, with the most prominent being, “Dialogues in Archaeology”: an informal, bottom-up, annual gathering of archaeologists, museologists, heritage specialists and others. The new, global mediascape and the opportunities offered by social media have aided this effort. Indeed, *Contested Antiquity*, a welcome and rich intervention in the debates, started its life as a session at the Ioannina meeting of the “Dialogues in Archaeology” series, held in 2015. The session then was called “Archaeology and Memory Wars”.

The editor should be congratulated in gathering a diverse but uniformly interesting and important set of papers, in editing them with care, and in persevering over the long gestation of the volume. Conflict is the central theme that holds these diverse papers together, meant in different ways and applied at different scales, from inter-state strife to local, village and community clashes. We read in the long but informative introduction by the editor that “[a]s practiced heritage, antiquities have been deployed not simply as signs of Greek national identity but mainly as weapons in the expression and negotiation of social differences, disagreements, and clashes...”. But was it not primarily because of the key role of antiquities in the national imagination and the nationalization of the country that antiquities became such powerful assets in negotiations and conflicts? Was it not the elevation of antiquities into such powerful, national symbolic values and entities that enable their weaponization, in “the expression and negotiation of social differences, disagreements, and clashes”? Besides, was their reframing within the national (-cum colonial) discourse not a fundamental clash in the first place, a clash that attempted (with partial and varied success) to remove antiquities from the fabric of daily routines and lives, and reconstitute them as national icons, as sacred relics, and as objects of certain kind of knowledge and (an)aesthetic appreciation?

The chapters have been grouped into three parts, the first titled “Beyond nationalism, colonialism and crypto-colonialism: historical perspectives and current implications”. Yet, one may contest the “beyond” in this title, given that we still operate within the national-cum-colonial modernity, and indeed as the chapters themselves illustrate, no perspective, historical or otherwise can ignore such pervasive phenomena. Further, colonialism and crypto-colonization are rather under-played in this collection, and the same applies to coloniality as a broader condition of power and knowledge (cf. Mignolo 2007). Nevertheless, the four chapters grouped under this heading are valuable and worthwhile. Plantzos references a broad range of materials, from antiquities exhibited in the Athens Metro stations to images in the Greek passports and the literary writings of Andreas Karkavitsas, to conclude that “[c]lassical antiquity – or rather its ghostly apparition, imagined, celebrated and recycled...is always here, though its overbearing presence is by and large experienced as a traumatic absence” (76). In a beautifully written chapter, Niki Sakka, explores colonial archaeology and the conflicts it brought about, as part of a careful study on the history of excavations at Asine, involving Swedish archaeologists, the Greek state, and various other actors. At the same time, she sketches out the mundane and intimate facets of life in the dig, as well as the affective and emotive bonds that were forged in the process. Bounia, Nikolaou, and Stylianou-Lambert contribute the only chapter dealing with Cyprus and as such they are forced to do rather heavy lifting, opt for breadth rather than depth, and provide much historical background in an attempt to address both main ethnic communities of the island; all very useful and important but one wonders if the decision to cover the rather complex, archaeologically and otherwise, case of Cyprus (historically a colony proper rather than a crypto-colonized country) with a sole chapter in a volume that deals almost exclusively with Greece, was a wise move. Yet the chapter is valuable in making scholars who work on Greece familiar with some of the complexities of Cypriot archaeology and society. The final chapter in this section, by Mouliou, deals with the presentations and evocations of cultural heritage in the Greek press during the post-war years, mining primarily the archives of two national newspapers, the centrist *To Vima*, and the leftist *Avgi*. A state-issued booklet published in 1948 (in the midst of the Greek Civil War) titled “Greece Calling” and targeting foreign western audiences is also discussed. The chapter is a broad presentation of material rather than an analysis and interpretation of any patterns, and one wished for more discussion on the way the Greek Left (or at least its part

expressed by *Avgi*) differed in their way of dealing with antiquities and their nationalization, compared to the conservative Greek establishment.

The second part of the book is titled “Spatial metaphors and ethnographic observations: heritage, memory, and dissonance”, and includes three strong and fascinating chapters, two of them explicitly adopting the lens of archaeological ethnography. The first, by Galiniki, deals with Greece’s second city, Thessaloniki, and the debates around material heritage under the mayorship of Yannis Boutaris (2011-2019), whose initiative to promote the multi-cultural legacy of the traditionally conservative and violently Hellenized city challenged and provoked the nationalists, including the very strong Church apparatus. Galiniki’s most important and rather sobering conclusion is that “[m]ulti-culturalism, as the city’s promoted identity, appears to be better received when it is proposed as a consumer product and a temporary escape from the difficulties of everyday life, not a permanent presence in the public urban space” (179). Constantinou presents us with an interesting and well-written archaeological ethnography of an important site we know little about from the point of critical heritage and the politics of the past: Dodoni in Epirus. She discusses the local appropriations and renderings of the site and the surrounding landscape, while an interesting strand which deserves further discussion and research (and not only in relation to Dodoni) is the impact of New Age movements in the perception and understanding of material heritage, evidenced in her interlocutors’ references to the “energetic fields” of the Dodoni valley and their impact on them. Anagnostopoulos’s archaeological ethnography compares two locales, ancient Kalaureia on the island of Poros, and the sites around the village of Gonies in central Crete. (In the interest of full disclosure, Anagnostopoulos has been a close collaborator of mine and we have been working together on the site of Kalaureia since 2007; cf. also Hamilakis and Ifantidis 2016). In this interesting and thoughtful text, the author asks us to go beyond the state-versus-people binary, to include in our discussions of archaeological sites as heterotopias the notion of utopias. He also invites us to reflect on the space of ambivalence opened up for people and communities in the arena of the archaeological law. In Kalaureia, the presence of archaeological zones and the associated restrictions imposed upon people by the archaeological service is seen as a huge problem for the tourism-oriented island, whereas at the mountainous and remote Gonies it is the lack of archaeological zones that people lament, seeing it as a sign of indifference by the archaeological service.

The final part (“Competing Pasts”) includes three diverse chapters which expand the thematic coverage of the volume. The one by Gazi deals with the controversy during the building of the new Acropolis Museum, and the initial plan to demolish two private buildings in front of it, architecturally and historically important on their own right. In a rare example where citizens’ initiatives took on the state and won, Gazi analyses the politics of visibility that underscored such a clash. The fascinating chapter by Stefanou and Antoniadou deals with the monument of Eptapyrgion (Genti Koule) in Thessaloniki, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here, the authorized heritage discourse imposed upon the site excluded its life as a prison (from the late 19th c. to the early 1970s). The authors used methods of archaeological ethnography and oral history to retrieve these overshadowed and side-lined memories, which enrich rather than denigrate its value. In this case, as in many other monuments in Greece, multi-temporality (and its denial) becomes an important battleground. In the final chapter, Yalouri and Rikou discuss a series of art interventions and installations which attempted to enter into dialogue with ancient monuments and archaeological sites, part of their extensive work on the matter (e.g. Yalouri 2022). They warn us that artistic interventions in archaeological sites may not necessary and on their own constitute progressive and challenging moves, but rather conform to the monumentalizing affinities of the context. But attempts at contestation are also frequent.

Their most evocative and successful work is the one by Natalia Biza, titled “Planting”, held at the Ancient Agora in Athens. This site was subjected to extensive purification and cleansing, following the demolition of the Vrysaki neighbourhood, to make way for the extensive excavations of the American School of Classical Studies in the 1930s (see Sakka 2008; Hamilakis 2013; Dumont 2020). In this cleansed and monumentalized landscape, the artist tagged and thus made visible the plants that grew on their own, untamed and unruly, and not part of the official landscaping of the site that followed the demolition and the excavations.

This rewarding collection invites reflection on the themes and approaches not included here but also on the challenges for the years ahead. For a start, one would have wished for a serious interrogation of the concept of heritage itself, which seems to have been taken for granted here. When do the material traces of the various pasts become heritage? And what is gained and what is lost in this transformation? What if we adopt the perspective, advocated by some colleagues, that the process of heritagization amounts to colonization (variously conceived), commodification and exploitation (e.g. Alonso González 2019), as well as to the taming of matter and its untimely and unruly character? Further, why is it that migration, a process that has been radically transforming the country in the past few decades, is not addressed, despite the brief mention in the Introduction? What are the challenges that this phenomenon poses for notions of heritage and for archaeology, and what kind of simmering tensions does it bring to the surface? Finally, and to follow on from the last point, race, racialization, and the position of Greece and its material heritage within the structures of whiteness owe to be a major matter of investigation and debate in the decades to come. Greece and its material culture have been entangled with the establishment of white supremacy in the western world. This is not simply a matter of certain “misuses” of some extremists but constitutes instead a foundational process, a deep-rooted ideological, biopolitical and geopolitical order, and one from which Greece itself and especially its elites have benefitted. We can no longer remain silent on that front. But these are just thoughts for the future, as we contemplate and plan new work, and are no doubt shaped by this reviewer’s specific interests. This valuable collection has already done much and deserves to be read widely.

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