Essential Excavation Experts: Alienation and Agency in the History of Archaeological Labor

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ABSTRACT

Nineteenth-century archaeologists working in the Middle East managed local labor in ways that reflect capitalist labor management models. These archaeologists' memoirs reveal both the similarities in how they managed their projects and the differences in how locally hired laborers responded. Focusing on such differences illustrates the agency that local workforces have historically exerted over the archaeological process, even under alienating working conditions. I argue that while there is some emerging recognition of contributions that local communities have made to archaeology, taking a Marxist and historical view reveals how much archaeological knowledge production has fundamentally relied upon site workers' active choices.

Résumé: Les archéologues du 19e siècle qui travaillaient au Moyen-Orient géraient la main-d'œuvre locale selon les modèles capitalistes de l'époque. Les mémoires de ces derniers révèlent à la fois des similitudes dans leur façon de gérer leurs projets et des différences quant aux comportements des travailleurs embauchés sur place. Ces différences illustrent la capacité d'agir ou l'agentivité historique des mains-d'œuvre locales sur le processus archéologique, et ce, même si ces dernières étaient soumises à des conditions de travail aliénantes. J'avance que même si l'on commence à reconnaître les contributions des communautés locales sur l'archéologie, l'adoption de points de vue marxiste et historique révèle à quel point la production des connaissances archéologiques a fondamentalement dépendu des choix actifs des travailleurs sur place.

Resumen: Los arqueólogos que trabajaban en el Medio Oriente en el siglo 19 manejaban los asuntos laborales locales en formas que reflejan los modelos de gestión capitalista de trabajo. Las memorias de estos

arqueólogos revelan tanto las similitudes en la forma en que gestionaban sus proyectos y las diferencias en la forma en que respondían los trabajadores contratados localmente. Al abordar tales diferencias, se ilustra la agencia que los trabajadores locales han ejercido históricamente sobre el proceso arqueológico, incluso bajo condiciones de trabajo alienante. Yo sostengo que, si bien ha surgido algún reconocimiento de las contribuciones de las comunidades locales a la arqueología, un punto de vista marxista e histórico revela el grado en que la producción del conocimiento arqueológico ha dependido fundamentalmente de las elecciones activas de los trabajadores de sitio.

KEY WORDS

History of archaeology, Labor, Knowledge production, Middle East

Armies of Archaeological Laborers

In the opening scene of the 1973 film *The Exorcist*, the sun rises on an archaeological excavation in northern Iraq. The camera pans over hundreds of men, dressed in *shalwar*-style trousers, picking, shoveling, and heaving wheelbarrows across dusty golden sand dunes (Figure 1). This vision of archaeological excavation—of a zealous army of native laborers relentlessly taking down a mound of earth—is nearly as iconic and archetypical as the

Figure 1. Opening scene of The Exorcist (Friedkin 1973)

trope of finding a cursed amulet, which occurs only moments later in this opening sequence.

While jinxed treasures and hexed relics remain the province of archaeological fiction, the practice of hiring scores of local residents to carry out the manual labor of excavation is a very real and entrenched part of the discipline's history, particularly in the Middle East. Perhaps the earliest example dates to 1810, when Lady Hester Lucy Stanhope hired hundreds of the farmers living near Ashkelon, whose agricultural work made them extremely efficient diggers, to take their spades to the soil in the hope of uncovering gold (Meryon 1846, p. 159). Throughout the 19th century, as archaeological expeditions expanded across the Middle East, excavation directors continued to conscript entire villages of men and occasionally women to perform the digging, dumping, and household work of the excavation. German Egyptologist Émile Brugsch, for instance, hired 300 men to excavate the tomb of Deir el-Bahri and completed the work in 48 h (Brugsch and Maspero 1881). Jacques de Morgan, on his much longer dig at Susa, employed more than 1000, and Auguste Mariette, as the director of the antiquities service in Egypt from 1858 to 1881, had official permission to compel as many as 7000 people at one time to work as laborers on the excavations he initiated (Pollock 1999, p. 16; Dawson 1995, p. 276).

Over time, though the numbers fell to less staggering proportions, archaeologists working in the Middle East in the 20th century continued to engage massive workforces from the local communities where they dug. At Ur, Leonard Woolley maintained between 200 and 250 local laborers at a time from 1922 to 1936. George Reisner, during his excavations in the Sudan and at Sebastia, employed and trained 200–450 men to dig, carry baskets of soil, and operate railcars to transport the soil removed from sites (Lloyd 1963, p. 52; Reisner et al. 1924, p. 6). For most of the history of archaeology in the Middle East, archaeological fieldwork entailed recruiting scores of people from the local community to perform the manual labor of the dig.

This tradition of amassing an enormous excavation workforce has hindered the production of knowledge about the past in a number of ways. One central criticism lodged against such a strategy has been the concomitant difficulty in supervising the masses of fast-digging workers, spread across acres of *tells* and ruins (Fagan 2004; Lance 1981; Lloyd 1963; Maisels 1993). On projects such as the ones mentioned above, directors would only hire one or two supervisors for every 50–100 workers, making it impossible to ensure careful digging or informed decision making about excavation strategy. A great deal of information has thereby vanished forever, due both to the destruction of stratigraphy and to artifacts damaged or taken from the site. Some early archaeologists attempted to mitigate this problem by supplementing the minimal daily wages paid to workers with *bak-*

sheesh—a per-artifact monetary reward incentivizing workers to recover objects intact and hand them over to the director at the end of the day. Ironically, however, this practice seems to have accelerated the number of antiquities missing from the archaeological record, as paying for artifacts reinforced the antiquities market and drove up the price that dealers were willing to pay, making looting even more lucrative (Brodie and Luke 2006; Kersel et al. 2008). Accordingly, the supervisory and economic structures implicated in the large-scale local labor models employed for most of archaeology in the Middle East have together limited the quality and quantity of knowledge about human history in this region.

These practices have had not only epistemological consequences—but social and political ones as well. Such a military-style team organization does little to engage employees in the project for which they are laboring and instead alienates them from the scientific project and the uncovered cultural heritage. This was hardly an unfortunate but unintentional outcome of the practice of archaeology during the 19th and 20th centuries. At this time, after all, Middle Eastern archaeology was deeply entangled with Western colonial and imperial enterprises. Archaeological expeditions functioned as a search for a glorious, distant past wholly disconnected from the nomadic, rural, or small-scale communities living in the contemporary Middle East—and finding such evidence justified military conquest and forced relocation of local communities living on or near archaeological sites (Bahrani 1998; Colla 2007; Goode 2007; Kuklick 1996; Reid 1985, 2002; Silberman 1982). The labor that local men and women were performing on these excavations therefore ultimately served to accelerate their own loss of property and sovereignty. Even well into the 20th century, locally hired excavation workers continued to benefit little from working on archaeological projects, still predominantly directed by European and American researchers who paid extremely low wages and did not share their purpose, progress, hypotheses, or conclusions with local community members. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the paradigms of labor management utilized for most of the history of archaeology in the Middle East have to any degree benefited local laborers materially, politically, or intellectually (see also Bernbeck and Pollock 2004; Goode 2007; Quirke 2010; Steele 2005).

Instead, the labor structures of archaeological excavation in this historical context are reflective of the capitalist and scientific modes of labor described by Marx (2012 [1844]) and later Marxist scholars (ie. Braverman 1974; Drucker 1954; Friedmann 1964), who maintain that these models of labor organization and management disenfranchise and alienate workers from the product of their labor. Using two contemporaneous case studies from early Middle Eastern archaeology, I illustrate the similarities between their labor models and the capitalist and scientific modes of labor. Then,

by reading into the published memoirs of 19th-century archaeologists Giovanni Battista Belzoni and Sir Austen Henry Layard, I present how the local labor forces responded to these modes of labor—especially, the degree to which their responses exhibit alienation, in the Marxian sense of the term.

I have chosen to focus on these two men and the workers they hired as case studies primarily because of the similarities in how they ran their excavations and the historical circumstances under which they were working. Both men were active in the 19th century, and both men hired hundreds of local men to perform the earth-moving of their excavations. Neither Belzoni nor Layard had any formal training or education related to archaeology and instead worked largely to fill European museums with impressive antiquities. Their work and findings, too, were both used to justify later European colonial conquest of the regions where they conducted their excavations. Both Belzoni and Layard, moreover, share a great deal in their reputations today as flawed but fascinating protagonists in the history of archaeology whose mistakes—both personal and professional—can largely be excused when explained in the context of their times (see Ceram 1968; Larsen 1996; Hume 2011).

Much of this could be said about other 19th-century archaeologists, perhaps, but all of these points of similarity between Belzoni and Layard allow for as comparative an analysis as possible in this sort of historical examination. The many parallels between their excavations and specifically, the labor conditions on their excavations, set up the ability to consider the reasons behind similarities and differences in how the locally hired laborers on these projects reacted to their archaeological employment conditions. This is uniquely possible by examining Belzoni and Layard's memoirs because of an additional similarity between the two early excavators—one which sets them apart from many of their contemporaries: their explicit, extended discussion of the excavation workers in their published memoirs. Frequently, in publicly disseminated excavation narratives from this time period, local workers go unnamed or even unmentioned at all, appearing as distant silhouettes in photographs or as the implied subjects of actions described in the passive voice.

Of course, despite their explicit discussion of the local community members involved in excavations, even Belzoni and Layard's memoirs are fundamentally incapable of serving as records of the perceptions or experiences of the local communities themselves. Still, these memoirs can be read critically and compared to one another to illustrate: first, the extreme parallels between labor conditions on distant projects from this time period, and second, the highly divergent ways in which locally hired workers have chosen to respond to a consistent labor model. Using the memoirs in this way cannot provide insight into how the locally hired laborers *felt* about

the labor management systems under which they were employed; indeed, such insight is 200 years out of reach, as the local community members were not consulted during this time or included in documentation or publication. Belzoni and Layard's memoirs, however, can lay bare the ways that local laborers' reactions to excavation conditions have been viewed historically by archaeological project directors. I argue that focusing on the similarities in how projects from this time period were run—and on the differences in how local workforces responded—reveals how much agency local laborers have possessed in determining whether archaeological knowledge production halts or proceeds. And while in the 19th-century memoirs I am examining, these reactions are framed as reflective of natural or essential cultural traits of the groups being hired (either rebellious or obedient), taking on the Marxist lens in this analysis illuminates that these groups made specific decisions about how to respond to exploitative labor systems. This is significant—it presses the recognition that so much archaeological knowledge has been made possible because of choices that site workers have made, even in the context of disempowering and alienating labor management practices.

My aim in raising this perspective is to engage with the expanding scholarship performing critical histories of archaeology, which have focused on topics such as developments in archaeological theory and methods (Trigger 2007; Lucas 2001; Gramsch and Sommer 2011; Levy et al. 2007; Stiebing 1994), as well as the ideological conditions that have shaped both excavation and interpretation (Abu El Haj 2001; Dyson 2006; García 2007; Hamilakis 2007; Schlanger and Nordbladh 2008; Kehoe 1998; Wylie 2002). This body of scholarship critiques the ways in which archaeology was done in the past. Historians of archaeology explore how broader structural conditions affected the ways that archaeologists in the past conducted their work, as well as the converse—how individual archaeologists made decisions that affected the discipline. Most often, the aim of doing so—whether explicitly stated or implied—is to challenge contemporary archaeology to engage in similar reflexive examination regarding the institutional conditions shaping archaeological work today and how individuals archaeologists might change them. Much of this work, too, argues that this sort of examination is crucial to better archaeological science; without confronting *how* archaeological knowledge is produced, that knowledge will be lacking in necessary complexity and nuance (Lucas 2001; Berggren and Hodder 2003; Wylie 2002). Such an argument is especially compelling in light of how seldom local labor or its management is addressed or analyzed in archaeological archives and literature. This is no accident; the typical mode of local labor arrangement in archaeology throughout the history of the discipline leads to this very invisibility of the laborers' contributions. After outlining the features of this mode of production, I demonstrate its consequences

for archaeological epistemology. I show how archaeology has always relied not only on local laborers' physical work, but furthermore on their choices about how exactly to work under these alienating conditions. Without this understanding, which deemphasizes the classic archaeological protagonist, it is difficult to imagine futures for archaeological management that appropriately center the workers—local or otherwise—who have enabled successful excavations for centuries.

Entfremdung and the Excavation Process

While 'capitalism' has been taken to refer to a variety of economic systems arising in different places and moments in history (Banaji 2007; Coates 2000; Fulcher 1995; Hall and Soskice 2001; James and Gills 2006), I argue that a Marxian capitalist mode of production (as in Marx 1887, 2012 [1844]) defines the system for arranging labor that has dominated the history of foreign-led archaeological work in the Middle East. The features of this system, which took shape during the Industrial Revolution, include wage-based labor, ownership of the means of production by the owners of capital rather than the laboring class, and designing production to maximize profit above all else. The first and second of these are undeniably present across Middle Eastern archaeology; site workers have historically been paid hourly or daily wages, and it is the archaeologists, not the site workers, who have traditionally maintained control over the infrastructure enabling the recovery of archaeological assemblages and their distribution.

The case for the third feature of the capitalist mode of production being present in Middle Eastern archaeology must be made on the basis of a critical understanding of how foreign archaeologists have benefited in changing ways from excavation work. Certainly in many 19th-century projects, particularly in the early part of the century, many archaeologists sold the artifacts they found to dealers and museums in their home countries, thereby making overt monetary gain (Colla 2007; Fagan 2004; Kletter 2006; Majd 2003). But even today, one of the critiques frequently lodged within and against the archaeological discipline is that archaeologists often benefit from the recovery of artifacts and the production of archaeological knowledge at the expense of communities involved in the work of excavation (Atalay et al. 2010; Dawdy 2009; Hamilakis and Duke 2007; Killebrew 2010; Pollock 2010). It is archaeologists who earn jobs, promotions, tenure, awards, and grants for archaeological discovery and not the public stakeholders, descendant communities, and—most importantly for this case—locally hired laborers who participate in enabling archaeological research to move forward. The products of archaeological work, in this case, are less material than in classic Marxist formulations of capitalism,

but the effect wherein archaeologists benefit financially from local labor is the same.

If Marx's particular framework of the capitalist mode of production can be seen in the history of archaeological work in the Middle East, so too can his model of alienation, which asserts that the capitalist mode of production leads to workers experiencing a sense of powerlessness and an inability to fulfill the potential of their own skills, expertise, and abilities (2012 [1844]). For Marx, this occurs in stages: first, because the worker participates in neither the design nor consumption of the goods and services that he or she is laboring to produce, this worker experiences separation and divestment from these goods and services. Then, since this worker is receiving wages that provide the greatest return for the upper classes controlling the labor system—in other words, the lowest possible wages—the worker feels an ultimate lack of control and interest not only in the product but in the work activities themselves. This represents the second stage of alienation in Marx's theory: alienation from the act of producing. Finally, due to the worker's lack of self-determination in either the valuation of his or her abilities or the purposes to which his or her activities are directed, the worker suffers alienation from his or her *Gattungswesen*, translated to 'species-essence,' or the innate potential of any individual's human nature. Alienation from *Gattungswesen* is the final stage of Marx's model of *Entfremdung*—estrangement, or alienation.

All of the conditions that lead to these stages of *Entfremdung* in capitalist or stratified societies are at play in archaeological excavation, especially in the context of early Near Eastern archaeological work. Locally hired site workers, like proletariat laborers in the capitalist mode of production, did not design the practices that lead to the archaeological knowledge product, nor did they benefit from it. They did not gain any portion of the fame or professional prestige that excavation directors enjoyed as a result of their popular and academic publications. Furthermore, especially in the historical context of 19th- and early 20th-century archaeological work, site workers most often received minimal monetary compensation for their contributions to the creation of new archaeological knowledge. For instance, the men employed by Stanhope at Ashkelon 'received no pay, but they were treated well; for two meals were served up to them in the daytime, and no severity was used towards them' (Meryon 1846, p. 159). The exploitative nature of paying low (or no) wages, from the earliest projects to those taking place in the mid-20th century, is expressed by William Foxwell Albright (1954, p. 18), who explains that the reason why 'native labor is abundant and relatively cheap' is because agricultural work, which these men and women are normally engaged in, is seasonal, and as a result 'Arab peasants are so poor and so chronically undernourished that they are very glad of any opportunity.' Accordingly, the low pay for archaeological labor

is a direct outcome of the unstable, precarious economies of which archaeologists have explicitly taken advantage. The lack of self-determination, social capital, and fiduciary benefit which together lead to alienation in capitalist societies in Marx's view are therefore at play in the management of labor on archaeological excavations in the Middle East.

Furthermore, in his (1974) update on how Marx's theories continue to operate in society, Braverman points to another key principle in the organization of labor that propagates the conditions of alienation first identified by Marx, one that has persisted through the development of industrialization, modernity, and globalization. He describes 'the reduction of the worker to the level of an instrument in the production process… Labor in the form of standardized motion patterns is labor used as an interchangeable part, and in this form comes ever closer to corresponding, in life, to the abstraction employed by Marx in analysis of the capitalist mode of production' (Braverman 1974, p. 119, p. 125). Braverman demonstrates how, regardless of the specific task being performed—whether it is sewing a hemline, or sealing a package, or pressing a button, or entering the same keystroke over and over—it is fundamentally the breakdown of a total labor process into constituent elements requiring minimal training or skill that leads to workers' *Entfremdung* at various levels. Lacking the power to act upon one's learning and expertise, treated as a continually replicating object in the production process, workers from factories to Fortune 500 companies ultimately experience alienation from the product of their work as well as from the activities they have been directed to perform and perfect.

This principle, of identifying the worker with a singular object or step in the production process, appears differently depending on the particular economic system at work in a given context. Under Fordism, for example, this is accomplished through the creation of an assembly line in which each worker operates a particular machine in the pursuit of mass production of identical commodities (Lipietz 1982; Sabel 1982; Tolliday and Zeitlin 2003). This is not the system which has structured labor organization in Middle Eastern archaeology of course; aside from the absence of industrialization and mass production in archaeology, a primary feature of Fordist labor management is the payment of high enough wages that workers can afford to enjoy the products of their own labor. Neither is the earlier management theory of Taylorism a dominant system governing labor relations in Middle Eastern archaeology over its two centuries of operation, as Taylorism entails the empirical study of each stage of production in order to maximize economic efficiency (Littler 1978; Maier 1970). Indeed, the study of labor in archaeology is, if anything, a dramatically underresearched area (Berggren and Hodder 2003; Doyon 2014; Pollock 2010; Shanks and McGuire 1996).

Nevertheless, the published history of archaeology in the Middle East does reveal the long-standing prevalence of identifying workers as inseparable from, and no more than the tools they use in making their specific contributions to excavation progress. Flinders Petrie's essential fieldwork manual, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*, makes this clear, advocating that site workers should be paid on the basis of the stage in the excavation process for which they are each individually responsible. He illustrates his recommended payment structure, referring to each member of his work team as either 'pick' or 'basket' (1904, p. 31). The inanimate tools that these workers use become isometric with the workers themselves—an example of what Braverman calls 'the reduction of the worker to the level of an instrument in the production process.' The effect of two centuries of thus segmenting the excavation process remains trenchant today; Laurence Gillot reports that on contemporary archaeological fieldwork in Syria, a team of workmen comprises three men: a pick-man, a shoveler, and a basket man (Gillot 2010, p. 11).

The combination of these characteristics of capitalist labor management which are present in archaeological work—the dissociation of the excavation process into single pieces of equipment with which workers become identified, the low wages, the denial of agency over the excavation process, and the lack of intangible benefits received from the creation and dissemination of archaeological knowledge—engenders alienation in other production contexts. Determining whether locally hired laborers during the early periods of archaeology in the Middle East experienced the same sense of dissociation from their work, and the results of excavations require thinking about and looking for these groups of people in ways they have not been considered before. It is impossible to recover the emic perspectives of 19th-century archaeological laborers; indeed, being excluded from the documentation and publication practices of the excavation process was an integral component of identifying them with the exclusively physical tasks they were hired to perform. What is possible, however, is to read the memoirs of early archaeologists in a way that spotlights the excavation practices they employed. In doing so, the responses of the workers rise to the fore—and the ways in which they may have experienced and resisted the conditions of alienation become apparent.

Alienation and Belzoni's Excavations in Egypt

In 1816, when Giovanni Battista Belzoni arrived in Egypt, his intention was to contribute to hydraulics engineering projects going on at the time in the country. He had created a new kind of water wheel, built using leverage principles he had learnt during his time as a circus strongman,

and managed to gain an audience with Muhammad Ali Pasha to show it off. In the pasha's palace gardens, Belzoni constructed a prototype that, successfully moved water with unprecedented efficiency. When a young Egyptian boy attempted to use the machine, however, he was thrown violently and his leg was broken. Seeing this, the pasha rejected both the invention and Belzoni's prospective involvement in developing water infrastructure in Egypt (Belzoni 2001, p. 101).

This was not enough, however, to prevent Belzoni from conducting extensive archaeological work in Egypt in the years to come. Soon after his disastrous demonstration, Belzoni met Henry Salt, the new British Consul General, who hired Belzoni to recover exceptional antiquities throughout Egypt and to ship them to England. Belzoni went on to dig at Thebes, Giza, Abu Simbel, Karnak, and Edfu, among other places. And the labor management practices he employed at these places typify the capitalist modes of organizing workers outlined above. Belzoni's workers across Egypt were paid a mere fraction of a cent (in contemporary buying power) for the sweat and strain that enabled Belzoni to profit from the export of the antiquities these Egyptian men uncovered (Belzoni 2001, p. 111). And in some cases (at Abu Simbel for instance), the people who were paid in piasters could not even use them at all, since the local economy was based on a barter system. Belzoni narrates that when he offered a group of villagers a few coins for a day's work, they protested, 'What can we do with it? We cannot buy anything here' (Belzoni 2001, p. 132). The people whom Belzoni compelled to dig at Abu Simbel therefore effectively received no salary. Monetarily devaluing the archaeological work of native Egyptians in this way engenders an understanding that archaeological labor is quite literally of little worth—one that in Marx's view deeply impacts the self-image of the workers in a production process. Not only were the workers paid next to nothing for performing the manual labor of Belzoni's endeavors, they were also not involved in the conceptualization of the project. In the end, the antiquities were subsequently shipped thousands of miles away, challenging both ideologically and spatially any relationship between the workers and the archaeological objects being unearthed through excavation, as well as the knowledge gleaned from them. Belzoni's project and the way he managed the workforce exemplify the conditions of modes of production which lead to alienation in the Marxist sense.

This may explain why, throughout Belzoni's accounts of his work in Egypt, there are stories where one can read the dramatic resistance of the local population to his ability to profit from exploiting them. In Belzoni's imaginings of these stories, they are evidence of the challenges he faced and his ultimate ability to triumph over the inherent avarice and manipulative character of the local population. Read differently, however, these stories can be seen as evidence of the workforce laying claim to the prod-

ucts of their knowledge, skills, and manual labor, and fighting against a sense of alienation from their work and their identity.

At Qurna, for instance, when Belzoni hired a group of local residents to show him an alabaster sarcophagus and help remove it, they led him into the tomb but masked the exits so he was nearly trapped inside, attempting to trick him into thinking there would be no way to remove the sarcophagus (Belzoni 2001, p. 115). At Abu Simbel in 1817, the locally hired laborers organized to raid the boat where Belzoni had loaded the excavated artifacts to be shipped to England. They attempted to board the vessel, to take back these objects for which Belzoni would ultimately receive a commission order of magnitude higher than their wages. Ultimately, however, they were unsuccessful in retrieving any of the artifacts, when Belzoni's wife 'presented a pistol to them' (Belzoni 2001, p. 100).

Repeatedly, Belzoni's memoir recounts events where he ended labor strikes through bribery or even violence—working to prevent the men he had hired from deciding even the simple fact of whether they would work or not. Perhaps the most revealing example is during his famed excavation of the Memnon Head, which Belzoni attempted to begin during Ramadan—the holy month of the Islamic calendar during which Muslims refrain from eating and drinking between dawn and sunset. Expectedly, Belzoni met with resistance in trying to recruit labor at this time, but he managed to convince some men to work, chipping the Memnon Head from the stone architecture in which it was embedded and dragging it through the gripping, heavy sand of the desert in the thick of the Egyptian summer (Belzoni 2001). After several weeks of this work, the foreman that Belzoni had hired convinced the rest of the native workers to stop coming to the site—to strike. Belzoni responded to this by arriving at the foreman's house, physically assaulting the man, and bribing him to bring the workers back the next day. The following morning the troupe of workmen had returned to continue hauling the statue through the sands, wind, and heat of the Egyptian summertime.

Capitalist labor management in the classic sense involves restricting self-determination in all areas of the work process. Belzoni's methods for hiring and arranging labor on the archaeological excavations he ran exemplify precisely this. The native laborers he recruited lacked control in the nature of the work they completed, the worth of the work they completed, and even ultimately in the decision of whether to work at all. With all of these conditions in place, it is hardly surprising that even when these workers—who possessed the skills and knowledge to gain monetarily from digging and selling artifacts themselves—had the opportunity to do so beyond Belzoni's control, they chose not to.

During the removal of the Memnon Head in 1816, Belzoni realized he was running out of money. He needed to make a trip to raise more funds

and intended to return in a few months, demanding a promise from the local leadership that now, having seen the archaeological remains that existed there, no one from the community would dig in the meantime (Belzoni 2001, p. 141). More meaningful to Belzoni than this promise, though, was his belief that the workers and their families were too lazy to dig on their own; in Fagan's (2004, p. 90) words, 'he gambled on the indolence of the local people.'

Indeed, no substantial digging proceeded in Belzoni's absence by the time he returned. The reasons for this surely have nothing to with any indolence on the part of the native Egyptian workforce, but rather can be explained in terms of alienation. Alienation from the artifacts produced through excavation—from the potential to benefit from their monetary, symbolic, or historical value; alienation from the activities of excavation—from digging, from carrying soil, from transporting, and from collecting archaeological objects; and finally, alienation from self-determination—from mobilizing their expertise in excavation to design and carry out an archaeological enterprise and to benefit from the products of it. Belzoni's strategies for organizing labor on his archaeological projects during the 19th century in Egypt, based upon many of the same principles that Marx critiqued in capitalist society, had parallel impacts on the archaeological laborers, as seen in moments of violent resistance or unrealized opportunities to subvert the discipline into serving their own ends.

This response, however, was not the same in all archaeological contexts where the capitalist mode of labor management structured excavations. Examining other settings with as many circumstantial parallels as possible—the same region, the same time period, and most importantly the same capitalist paradigms of labor organization—locally hired excavation workers in these other contexts responded to the same labor conditions in very different ways. They instead developed apparent expertise in many aspects of the archaeological process and ultimately established themselves as indispensable to realizing a successful excavation, illustrating the extent to which the creation of archaeological knowledge has relied not only on the bodily work of native workforces but moreover on their particular, local responses to consistent management practices that archaeologists have employed—whether to resist or to become integral to the archaeological process.

Development of Independent Scientific Archaeological Approaches

Excavating in the 1840s at Nimrud, Sir Austen Henry Layard's strategies for organizing and managing a local archaeological labor force share the characteristics of capitalist labor relations evident in Belzoni's memoirs of his archaeological work. Like Belzoni, Layard was able to pay low wages (only 3–4 Ottoman piasters, or approximately $5.00 in today's buying power) to the workmen he hired, by recruiting labor from a community that primarily made its living from agricultural work and faced a lack of employment opportunities in the off-season (Larsen 1996). Furthermore, Layard's reports evince the sort of ultra-specialization of tasks that Marx and others critique. In appointing his workmen to specific jobs, Layard says:

> The Arabs were selected to remove the earth as they were unable to dig; this part of the labour required stronger and more active men; and I chose for it about fifty Nestorian Chaldaeans, who had sought work for the winter in Mosul; and many of whom, having already been employed, had acquired some experience in excavating (Layard 1849, p. 110).

Most significantly, Layard's own account suggests that he viewed the total excavation endeavor as metaphorically signifying the superiority of Western civilization over Oriental peoples and cultures. This dynamic is apparent in Layard's interaction with one of the workmen on his project at Nimrud, Abd-ur-rahman, who asked Layard how he knew where to dig and that they would find so many ancient remains. Layard 'seized this opportunity to give him [Abd-ur-rahman] a short lecture upon the advantages of civilization and of knowledge… All I could accomplish was, to give the Arab Sheikh an exalted idea of the wisdom and power of the Franks' (1849, 316). From the perspective of Abd-ur-rahman in this particular circumstance, a serious methodological question received a response asserting that his culture, at an essential level, was inferior to that of Germanic people. In so doing, Layard unambiguously links Abd-ur-rahman's role as an excavation laborer to his human nature (Marx's *Gattungswesen*); both are effectively undermined and devalued simultaneously, creating the evident framework underpinning the Marx's third and final stage of alienation.

Nevertheless, examining the way that Layard's workmen behaved in the context of these conditions reveals a very different response from the antagonism and outright resistance apparent in the Belzoni case. Certainly, Layard's efforts (like Belzoni's) were not wholeheartedly welcomed by the residents of the area. The local pasha Mohammed Keritli Oğlu at one point attempted to thwart Layard's activities by paying the workmen to plant

Muslim graves on the archaeological mound, so that Layard would be forced to stop digging in order not to disturb these burials (Layard 1849, p. 46). Bedouin tribes living in the region, moreover, repeatedly stole the project's tools and equipment.

But Layard's workmen—particularly those hired from the Jebour tribe—appear repeatedly in his memoirs as trusted experts in the excavation process. When Bedouin tribes in the area attempted to sabotage the project by stealing materials, it was the Jebour men who enacted revenge by stealing the items back (and sometimes more) (Layard 1849). Layard also felt comfortable with leaving the men he had hired to work without his supervision, while he went to explore other sites; he left about a hundred men excavating at Kuyunjik, while he went to visit Nimrud, for instance. These men developed impressive excavation abilities that Layard himself recognized, repeatedly hiring the same groups of people for season after season and site after site. One native Assyrian man whom he hired again and again, Hormuzd Rassam, ultimately went on to lead his own excavations on behalf of the British Museum at places like Nimrud and Nineveh; Rassam even published his own archaeological memoirs for popular distribution like Layard and other archaeologists of the time (Rassam 1897).

The paradigmatic labor management strategies of archaeological projects in the 19th century, exemplified by both the Belzoni and Layard case studies, evidently resulted in extremely different responses from the local labor force whose physical strength and excavation skills served the exclusive benefit of the foreign expedition leaders. Unlike the alienation from and demonstrative resistance to the archaeological enterprise legible in the native workmen on Belzoni's projects, those who dug for Layard developed measurable and marketable archaeological experience. Rather than creating distance from excavation methodology and the archaeological knowledge product, on Layard's excavations the hyperspecialized tasks assigned to workers led to their development of very particular methodological and historical expertise—so much so that they could and did excavate on their own, without his oversight or direction.

Comparing these two contexts, which despite their differences (different countries, different project leaders, different decades) are extraordinarily parallel in their arrangement, reveals the power that locally hired laborers possess to enable, prevent, and shape the production of archaeological knowledge. Operating under extremely similar circumstances, the groups of workers examined here made very divergent decisions about how best to respond to an exploitative labor system, whether to rise up demonstratively against it or to resist the devaluation of their work by establishing themselves as essential to the production of artifacts and historical knowledge. Importantly, these two particular case studies are extremely similar to

numerous other archaeological expeditions to the Middle East in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead of Belzoni, I could have described the way that Auguste Mariette managed local labor on his excavations, or Louis Félicien de Saulcy in Jerusalem. Instead of Layard, I could have examined the way that the locally hired workmen who excavated under Flinders Petrie, or Seton Lloyd, or Robert Koldewey, developed recognizable expertise and knowledge despite being managed by the same principles designed to maximize returns on labor costs. A critical understanding of how archaeology works—how it affects and is affected by local laborers—relies upon the recognition that native workers, operating under extremely similar management conditions across archaeological contexts, have purposefully chosen different ways to position themselves in relation to archaeology as a discipline and an industry, sometimes establishing themselves as indispensable archaeological experts.

Conclusions

The relations that Belzoni and Layard enjoyed—or suffered—with the local community members they hired are by no means snapshots from an unrecognizable past time in the discipline. On the contrary, Shanks and McGuire (1996), Berggren and Hodder (2003), Doyon (2014), Lucas (2001), Silberman (1989), and Steele (2005) have all indicated how forms of labor management which have typified archaeological projects continue into today. They have shown how these systems of labor organization serve to marginalize the native people hired to carry out the manual labor of the excavation process (see also Paynter 1983; Everill 2009; Hamilakis 2015 who highlight similar hierarchies and disenfranchisement in commercial archaeology). This marginalization, they have shown, can take monetary, social, and intellectual forms where local community members may be drastically underpaid, socially segregated from the rest of the excavation team, and intellectually excluded from various stages of the knowledge production process. Most often, of course, all of these co-occur.

Likewise, the recognition that locally hired laborers possess specialized skill sets and insights is equally long-standing in archaeological discourse. Aside from Layard, both Petrie (1904) and Seton Lloyd (1963), among others, make explicit statements about the talents or indispensability of the native workmen in their respective contexts. So it is neither groundbreaking, on the one hand, to note that archaeologists have structured excavations in ways that overwhelmingly disenfranchise local laborers, nor, on the other hand, to argue that despite these conditions local laborers have been able to become recognized in certain circumstances as archaeological experts. But neither of these approaches pay sufficient direct attention to

the active and powerful choices that locally hired archaeological workforces make regarding how they react to the exploitative labor structures in place on excavations, nor to the consequences of these choices for the production of archaeological knowledge.

While it remains essential for archaeologists to reflect critically on the history of its treatment of the living communities in the places where we work, and to both propose and practice radical new modes of engagement with nonspecialist communities, there is a danger in focusing exclusively on draconian excavation directors of the past. The act of assembling vivid critique of their interactions with local populations on these expeditions can serve to aggrandize and retain focus on the same individuals on whom disciplinary attention has traditionally centered—constructing a 'villain' narrative in opposition to the conventional 'hero' narrative (Baram 2011; Silberman 1995; Holtorf 2007). In either telling, it is the archaeologist who is at the center, and the same power dynamics and politics of representation are recreated, the same people are effaced.

Taking an alternative approach of reading archaeological history in search of the expertise and skills that certain groups of locally hired archaeological laborers developed indicates how much archaeological knowledge simply could not and would not have been produced without both their physical and intellectual contributions. Local laborers' abilities to recognize sites, stratigraphic transitions, and to lift fragile artifacts unharmed allowed for new discoveries and understandings that would have otherwise been impossible. But in discussing only the evidence for the skills that these men and women possess, the process by which they acquired this expertise is left unexamined. We therefore gain little insight into either the structures blocking their full involvement in the archaeological process or the ways in which they overcame these operational challenges.

It is only through an awareness of the active choices that locally hired laborers have made about how to respond to the imposition of profit-maximizing, low-paying, hyperspecialized labor management systems that current archaeologists can adequately appreciate the degree to which workers' decisions and actions have shaped the production of archaeological knowledge. Local community members' responses to the labor arrangement in place on archaeological excavation have been responsible for either preventing or promoting how well or quickly excavation proceeds and, in many cases, whether it proceeds at all. Under the same employment conditions, different communities in different contexts have made disparate decisions: either, for instance, to raid boats in order to take back antiquities intended for export, or to become established as excavation experts and to carry out the digging on project after project.

This insight relocates responsibility for the production of knowledge to those who carried out the physical labor of the archaeological process.

According to this view, the production of knowledge is neither solely due to the efforts of the early archaeologists coming from Europe and the USA, nor *in spite of* the alienating ways that they conscripted and arranged labor. It decenters the role that these men played, and instead prioritizes the agency that locally hired laborers exercised in either aggressively resisting archaeological enterprises or becoming essential to them. Focusing attention on this agency makes clear how much is owed to archaeological workers' particular localized responses to a broadly applied labor structure which, the historical record reveals, was designed to maximize benefit for the archaeologists and minimize workers' control within the overall project.

What would the archaeological record look like if this was not the case? How would archaeological knowledge be transformed if the means of its production were not controlled by archaeologists alone but shared with local stakeholders? This would require intentional anti-capitalist disciplinary changes: ceding decision-making authority not only over research design but also over employment conditions such as hiring decisions, safety protocol, and wages. More inclusive, less alienating labor management conditions would open up the ways in which locally hired laborers would be able to contribute to the archaeological knowledge production process. The agency that they have always exerted over whether and how archaeological fieldwork can proceed would instead enable more diverse, inclusive, and nuanced conclusions about the past.

Admittedly, this benefit—in terms of knowledge about the past—is mainly for the archaeological community. There is the argument to be made, of course, that more complex understandings about human history are of value to all humankind. This value, though, is intangible and is experienced unequally by people around the world (Byrne 1991; Appiah 2006; Foner 2002). One could also make the argument that local communities being able to make some determinations over their employment conditions would benefit them economically. This may be true, but it is unlikely that archaeology will ever be a transformationally money-making endeavor for local laborers. It is much more honest to admit that changing the ways in which archaeological knowledge is produced is in the interest of archaeologists, first and foremost.

After all, what this historical analysis reveals is that workers have always decided, for themselves, whether or not to participate in excavation—whether to contribute their expertise actively, whether to dig diligently, whether to arrive to work and leave on time, whether to report all of their findings, whether to take and sell antiquities for themselves, whether to resist. The historical conditions of archaeological labor have alienated local laborers from the excavation process, leading to resistance and raiding. The outcomes of these labor conditions have accordingly had

greatly detrimental impacts for archaeologists and the state of historical scholarship. It is therefore in archaeologists' best interests to imagine new ways of doing the business of excavation, to imagine new ways of organizing archaeological labor, and to consider how sharing the means of archaeological knowledge production might create opportunities for practiced excavation experts to choose to contribute imaginatively to the archaeological record.

In seeing that workers' productive participation in the excavation process was by no means an inevitability, the contributions of locally hired laborers to the production of archaeological knowledge become that much more vital. Both the boat raiders and the established experts were exploited by archaeological labor management systems; both, too, strongly resisted the stages of alienation these systems inculcated. The expansion of knowledge of human history during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, is deeply indebted to those who continued to ask questions, to develop specialized toolkits, to excavate carefully even unsupervised—because to do all of these things was not their only available option. They decided to dig, expertly, and the discipline as a whole benefited.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares she has no conflict of interest.

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