ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

ALALAKH AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

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MAKING USE OF THE PAST:
THE POSSIBILITIES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

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Abstract*

Historiographical research in archaeology has recently experienced an archival turn. Many researchers explore archaeological archives, whether they were formed as part of institutional or national depositories or, like the Tell Atchana excavation archive (Woolley Papers) held by the Institute of Archaeology at UCL, stem from individual excavation projects. This chapter explores the many avenues open to researchers using material from such archival collections, while keeping in mind that archives and their component parts are objects in their own right. Digitisation, particularly of photographs, can open access to archaeological research for a wider range of audiences through online databases, exhibitions and community engagement projects. Ultimately, such initiatives can help to virtually reunite archives and objects located in different museums.

Fifteen years of excavations at Tell Atchana, Alalakh, have produced a vast and extremely varied field of research, of which the chapters in the present volume are the best example. Based on the excavations of Charles Leonard Woolley (1880–1960) at Tell Atchana from 1936 to 1939 and 1946 to 1949, the current excavation under the directorship of Professor Yener has inspired scholars and students from a variety of backgrounds and specialties to explore objects or samples excavated at Tell Atchana for a plethora of studies, publications, experiments and as teaching materials. Objects from Alalakh are on display at the Hatay Archaeological Museum, the British Museum in London, the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford and in many university study collections. It is primarily through objects like these that archaeologists, curators and educators communicate their ideas about the ancient past to those they want to reach. And it is objects that were the main drive for archaeological research in the Middle East throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.[1] This work was predominantly conducted by European or American scholars, often funded by national museums, aided by national governments or their colonial extensions, and publicised by newspapers, radio broadcasts and, later on, television programmes and films as the work of 'the archaeologist'. The lone hero — and up until today the archaeologist in the popular imagination is mainly portrayed as male — is depicted singlehandedly saving ancient and 'lost' treasures from the dust of history and bringing 'forgotten kingdoms' back to life.[2]

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[1] Hoock 2007; Bahrani *et al.* 2011.
[2] Woolley 1953.

In reality, archaeology, especially fieldwork, has always been a collaborative practice. Woolley had several main long-term collaborators: his wife, Katharine Elizabeth Woolley (1888–1945), and his foreman Sheikh Hamoudi ibn Ibrahim el Awassi and his sons.[3] They contributed substantially to his work, as Woolley regularly pointed out, but never co-authored any of his articles or books, and all remain elusive figures in the archaeological record.[4] Yet their presence and that of many others only alluded to by Woolley can be reconstructed from the archival record of the Tell Atchana excavations.

In recent decades, archaeological archives have received increased attention in historiographical research. Archaeology as a discipline has been catching up with its own history,[5] with its interdependence on the processes of modernity and the formation of nations, especially the state as an instrument of empire and control.[6] As Ian Hodder points out, '[f]or many European countries, for example, the archaeological past still has a self-evident relationship with the state. The protection of ancient monuments [and this includes objects] is a function of national governments…'[7] Yet the creation of the French and British Mandates in the Middle East and Northern Africa after World War I denied these newly created states this relationship. Antiquities legislation favourable to archaeologists and their funding (national) institutions was often developed by the archaeologists themselves.[8] This deep entanglement between archaeology and the state has become the focus of in-depth studies in recent decades. A shift away from tales of strings of 'great discoveries'[9] towards a closer look at institutional and personal networks,[10] and with a view towards some of the socio-political and historical backgrounds to these discoveries, is noticeable.[11] Research such as that conducted by Magnus T. Bernhardsson (2010) makes extensive use of archival records, including those formed as part of archaeological projects like Ur in southern Iraq. This 'archival turn' in archaeological historiography presents a shift away from exploring excavations solely through the biographies of their practitioners and the material culture, that is, the objects, they unearth.[12] It further takes into account the often haphazard way such archaeological archives were formed. Not subject to state-controlled policies of record-keeping, the survival rate of archaeological archives and their content can be low. They are further prone to shifting priorities within the institution acting as a depository, reflecting changing curators' or archivists' choices, as well as technological advances in records management. A number of initiatives and projects have recognised

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[3] On Katharine Woolley, see H. V. F. Winstone's (1990) biography of Woolley, which depicts her in a rather unfavourable light. See also Kaercher 2016a; Shillito n.d. On Sheikh Hamoudi see Woolley 1920; Kaercher 2016b.

[4] In the introductory paragraphs to his preliminary reports, Woolley mentioned some of the members of his team and his funders. See, for example, Woolley 1937.

[5] The literature available here is vast. See, for example, Christenson 1989; Schlanger and Nordbladh 2008; Trigger 2008; Lucas 2010.

[6] Thomas 2004; Trümpler 2008.

[7] Hodder 2003, pp. 55–56.

[8] Segret 2012.

[9] Fagan 2007, 2014.

[10] Thornton 2015.

[11] Chevalier 2002; Lydon and Rizvi 2010.

[12] Baird and McFadyen 2014, p. 14.

the importance these collections carry for the history of the discipline. Digitisation and open access through an online database or website are often seen as the path to diversifying audiences and users of such materials. An important factor in not only digitising the material but making it available online for free is the growing awareness by mainly Western scholars and institutions of the power structures involved in the formation of their collections stemming from former conquered or colonised regions and their exploited source communities.[13] Preservation and conservation needs, lack of storage availability, as well as staffing and collections care costs are factors not as often acknowledged but further contributing to the move to the digital archive.[14]

Leonard Woolley's archive of the Tell Atchana excavations presents a slightly different situation than archives housed in large research institutions. It is cared for by the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) at University College London, but its formation process and history before its arrival at the IoA remain sketchy at best.[15] The glass plate negatives in the Woolley Papers are stored in a variety of containers, mainly cardboard and wooden boxes. These, as well as the individual sleeves in which some of the negatives are stored, show handwritten descriptions or annotations (**Fig. 1**). Some of the negatives themselves carry numbers, the meaning of which, in the absence of an index, remains unclear (**Fig. 2**). Most likely they refer to the sequence of images taken during the excavation seasons. The information thus collected over time is an integral part of the photographic object, and, as Elizabeth Edwards argues, "[B]oxes… in archives are not neutral spaces… but are entangled in shifting sets of values derived from and embodying specific institutional and affective engagements with users."[16] In addition to photographs of the excavation in progress, the main bulk of photographs cover the range of objects and materials found at Tell Atchana (pottery, metal, bone, ivory, clay, and stone objects, but no images of burials or other skeletal remains). Scales were used only sparingly, predominantly for shots of small finds and pottery sherds (**Fig. 3**). They are absent in excavation shots[17] and do not occur in images showing one or several complete or restored vessels (**Fig. 4**). Figure 4 furthermore illustrates the field number system assigned to each object during the excavation. Woolley never explained his numbering system in great detail, but it seems that most ceramic material was marked with an ATP number. Clay tablets were sometimes given ATT numbers and other types of objects AT numbers. A typical field number for a vessel would therefore be ATP/8/196. This denotes the object as from the 1938 season. During that year, most field numbers were

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[13] See, for example, AREA, Archives of European Archaeology (http://www.area-archives.org/), ARACHNE, the online database of the German Archaeological Institute (http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/drupal) and the Ur Online Project of the British Museum and the Penn Museum (http://www.ur-online.org/), to name but a few [All accessed 24 August 2017].

[14] Terras (2012, pp. 49–50) further explores some of the issues, mainly the high costs, of digitisation projects from a digital humanities perspective. See Sassoon 2004 for a critical view on digitisation projects with a Benjaminian stance on the mechanical/digital reproduction of images.

[15] It is archived under the name 'Woolley Papers' and contains other, non-Atchana-related material. See Maloigne 2012, 2014 for further details on the archive's content and history.

[16] Edwards 2009, p. 146; Baird and McFadyen 2014, pp. 16–19.

[17] This is of course not to suppress the significance of the human figure employed as scale, specifically in the context of the Orientalist gaze; see, for example, Behdad and Gartlan 2013; Nochlin 1989, pp. 36–37. Cf. Dorrell 1989, pp. 52–55 for another view of the use of the human figure as scale.
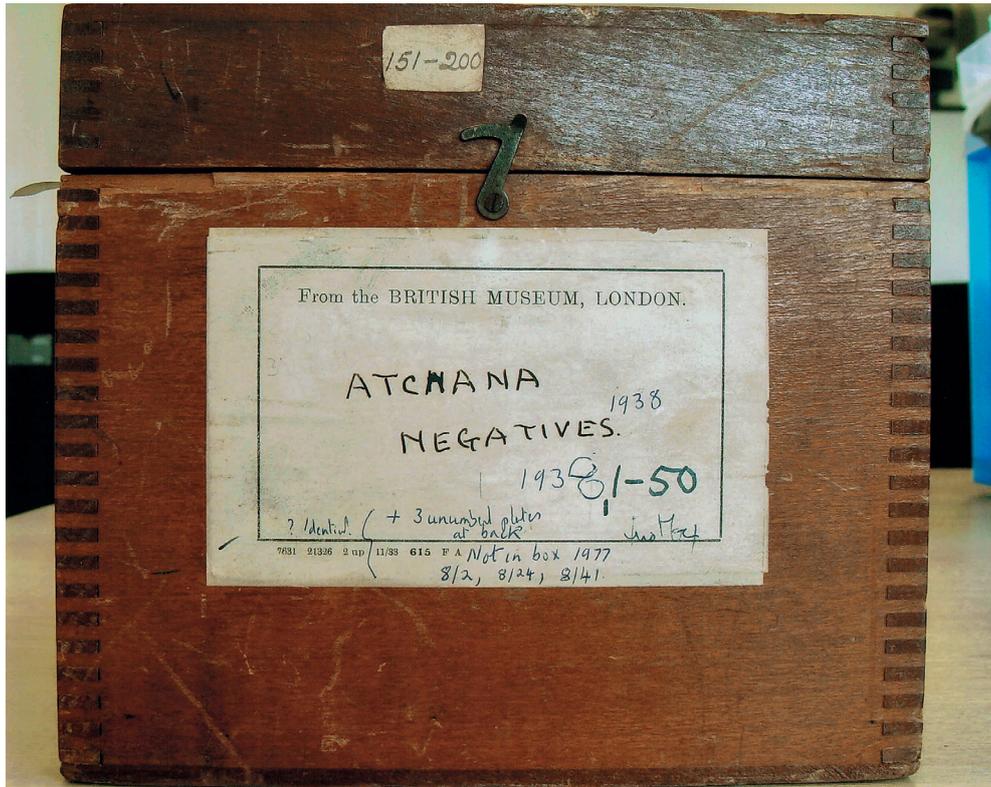
Fig. 1. Wooden storage box in the Institute of Archaeology Archives.
By permission of UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections, photo by the author.

Fig. 2. Excavations at Tell Atchana (WP_11_040). © UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections.

Fig. 3. Small Finds from Tell Atchana: Clay Figurines (WP_10_046).
© UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections.

written with a single number 8. By 1939 the year came to be denoted by a two-digit number (e.g., ATP/39/XY), and in the final publication the numbers were standardised to two digits, presumably in order to avoid confusion with objects found in 1948.[18] Information thus collated from the images and the objects themselves, as well as museum collections and other archives, can hence be combined to enhance our knowledge of objects stemming from Tell Atchana. To follow Frederick N. Bohrer, "[r]ather than completely capturing or recording, the photograph's value is its filtering, reorganizing, and fundamental improvement upon real conditions."[19]

Most of these glass plate negatives, which form the bulk of the material in the archive, were digitised from 2012 to 2014 by the author. Some of the digitised images were shown in an exhibition at Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (RCAC) in 2014, under the title *The Forgotten Kingdom. Archaeology and Photography at Ancient Alalakh*.[20] They introduced to a wider audience for the first time some of the excavation processes employed by Woolley and the actors involved in them. The juxtaposition of these images in the exhibition with those taken by Murat Akar in his capacity as excavation

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[18] Woolley 1955. Comparison with the British Museum online catalogue allows us to identify the object in figure 4 as one registered under the number BM 126193. http://britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx [Accessed 30 August 2017]. I am grateful to Dr Rachael Sparks for her comments on this point.

[19] Bohrer 2008, p. 184.

[20] Akar and Maloigne 2014a.
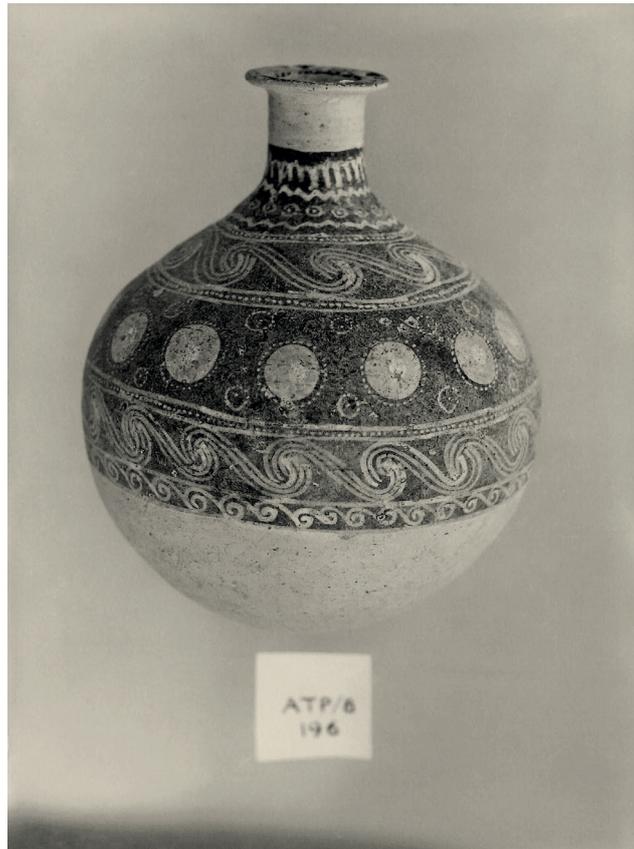
Fig. 4. Nuzi Ware Vessel from Tell Atchana (WP_12_022).
© UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections.

photographer since 2006 illustrated how far archaeologists have come in acknowledging the importance of the local community for any archaeological project. Whether as members of the field team, or employed in finds processing or house work, locals have been involved in the excavations at Tell Atchana since 1936, many of them over the course of several years. Akar's aim as photographer, archaeologist and chronicler at Tell Atchana is to portray the social as well as scientific aspects of an excavation. Foremost, this means re-introducing a human aspect into archaeology and recognising "the value of multivocality."[21] As outlined above, archaeology happens in neither a political nor a social vacuum and "all fieldwork, whether it is archaeology or palaeontology or geology or something else, has an impact on living people."[22] These people can be members of the community that lives on or around a site and will continue to do so even if archaeological projects come to an end, or the archae-ological community that comes together for a short period of time during an excavation season.[23] By documenting members of both communities and how they work together, the

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[21] Hodder 2003, p. 58.
[22] Pyburn 2009, p. 163.
[23] See www.alalakh.org [Accessed 11 September 2017] for an overview of the various projects, the site and team members.

interconnections and interdependence of both come to light in Akar's studies (**Figs. 5–6**). Akar's work furthermore reflects the dedication to outreach and education programmes the Alalakh excavation team have developed over the last decades. Since 1995, the Amuq Valley Regional Projects have been engaging with the citizens of the Amuq Valley to preserve the rich archaeological heritage of the region and to raise awareness of the close links between the archaeological and local communities.[24]

Being able to display previously unpublished images from an archaeological archive in an exhibition is just one of the outcomes of engaging with an archival collection. The involvement of Western scholars and museums as outlined above has resulted in the worldwide dispersal of objects from Middle Eastern (and other) excavations. Often objects from one site or even one context within an excavation were distributed to a range of museums, and re-integration is a long and arduous process. Projects like *Ur Online* by The British Museum and the Penn Museum or *Artefacts of Excavation* (headed by researchers at UCL and the University of Oxford) aim to retrace the journeys these objects undertook and facilitate the study of geographically separated collections.[25] Similarly, objects from Tell Atchana have come to be housed in several museums in and outside of Turkey, and documentation regarding the distribution of finds is fragmentary at best.[26] The images in the Woolley Papers thus offer a scaffold on which to build a virtual archive of Tell Atchana material that could include objects as well as the material held in the Institute of Archaeology archives.

The glass plates, the images they carry and the archive as a whole are hence intricately connected and intertwined. Knut Ebeling astutely remarks:

> wenn jede Digitalisierung auf der Tatsache beruht, dass der Datenträger die Information mitbeeinflussen und mitbestimmen kann, dass jedes Archivierte das Archiv mit definiert, dann muss jede Information und jedes Wissen aus diesem Archiv …. über dieses Archiv mitinformieren, mitberichten, mitwissen.[27]

And although Ebeling continues by calling the archive, somewhat sarcastically, a junk- or storeroom, he recognises its significance in holding great potential for the exploration of archaeological knowledge.[28] The archive defines and informs on its objects and vice versa, and digitisation adds another layer by opening up access to the archive *in addition* to its analogue materiality in those dusty storerooms. While in a digital age the storage of born-digital photographs may present its own set of challenges,[29] exploring a historically formed excavation archive means engaging with the archive and the photograph — or in this case

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[24] Yener 2005, pp. 15–16. See Arauz 2014 for an account of recent community engagement projects at Tell Atchana.

[25] Hafford 2013; Ur Online Project: see footnote 13, above; Artefacts of Excavation: http://egyptartefacts. griffith.ox.ac.uk/ [Accessed 30 August 2017].

[26] Maloigne 2017; 2012, p. 35 for a preliminary list of UK museums housing material from Alalakh. See the Alalach-Archiv hosted by the Hethitologie-Portal Mainz of the University of Würzburg for an overview of tablets in museum collections: http://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/Alalach/alalarch.php [Accessed 11 September 2017].

[27] Ebeling 2004, p. 15: "If every digitisation is based on the fact that the data carrier influences and co-determines the information, that all archived material also co-defines the archive, then all information and all knowledge resulting from this archive must in return inform and report on and know about this archive."

[28] Ebeling 2004, p. 23: 'die Abstellkammer' or 'Gerümpelkammer.'

[29] See Houghton 2016 with references.

Fig. 5. Nurettin Bataray, Christine Johnston, Abdullah Öz, Harun Gökalp and Cengiz Kurt
excavating in Square 32.57. © Alalakh Excavations Archive, photo by Murat Akar.

Fig. 6. Hatice Öz engaged in reconstruction work in the courtyard of the Level VII palace
(Square 33.32). © Alalakh Excavations Archive, photo by Murat Akar.

the negative — as an object in and of itself. To think of photographs merely as carriers of information is to ignore a wide range of questions such as: who actually took the photograph,[30] the cost and procurement of photographic materials such as cameras, negatives and developing solutions, and issues of conservation and preservation.[31] As Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart point out in the introduction to their seminal volume *Photographs Objects Histories*, "… photographs have inextricably linked meanings as images and images as objects; an indissoluble, yet ambiguous, melding of image and form, both of which are direct products of intentions."[32] It is some of these intentions I aim to trace in the closing paragraphs.

Many of the images in the Woolley Papers can be found in Woolley's preliminary articles in *The Antiquaries Journal* or in the final publication of 1955, but the images *not* chosen for publication can say just as much about a site or process as the ones that were.[33] Thus, we can choose to interpret or look at an image like **Figure** 7 in a variety of ways.[34] It is payday at Tell Atchana in 1939, and Woolley holds court — quite literally — in the

Fig. 7. Payday at Tell Atchana: Leonard and Katharine Woolley and Hamoudi ibn Ibrahim el Awassi pay the workforce (WP_8_003). © UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections.

[30] For a discussion on the authorship of the photographs in the Woolley Papers see Akar and Maloigne 2014b. See also Quirke 2010; Shepherd 2003.
[31] Gillet *et al.* 2010; Lavédrine 2009.
[32] Edwards and Hart 2004, p. 2.
[33] Woolley 1937, 1938, 1939, 1948, 1950.
[34] Thanks go to Dr. Murat Akar in developing this idea.

entrance of the Level IV palace at Tell Atchana. Workers were paid weekly according to their position on the excavation (either as basket carriers, pick-axe or spade men) and sometimes an additional system rewarding small finds was in place. This accounting system was balanced each week and required every man to be called up to the desk individually. Woolley's — or the photographer's — choice of location and set-up is telling. The Level IV palace was one of the most important discoveries of the seasons prior to World War II and led to the identification of the site with the city of Alalakh, previously only known through textual records from other sites.[35] Framed by one of the few stone structures on the site, separated from the workforce by the table, Woolley's intended hierarchy is made quite clear. Did Woolley perceive himself as the last in the line of kings at Alalakh and therefore chose the setting in the palace? One could also argue that the scene was staged. Woolley was, through his experience at Ur, rather accomplished at publicising and popularising his work for newspaper and magazine readers.[36] As the excavation at Tell Atchana relied on public subscription,[37] it was perhaps with a view to 'good copy', pandering to the perceived or real expectations of readers about 'life on an excavation' that such a scene was performed in this particular space.

These are just two of the possible intentions with which this picture could have been taken. Inevitably, each researcher must take her own intentions in exploring and interpreting these images into account. With a feminist point of view on archaeology and society, I immediately notice how Katharine Woolley remains on the margins of this artificial power structure — whether created intentionally or not — while Sheikh Hamoudi, as a man, has been granted a place behind the table next to Leonard Woolley. As an archaeologist or conservator, another researcher would perhaps criticise the volume of people walking over a recently excavated area.[38] A third researcher might choose to look at the wide range of headdresses — from Katharine Woolley's pith helmet style and Leonard Woolley's telescope crown panama hat, Sheikh Hamoudi's keffiyeh and agal, to the various caps and fezzes worn by the men waiting to be paid — and what these might signify.[39] There are thus scores of possible approaches to this photograph and the photographer's intentions. Reflecting Knut Ebeling's appeal to consider and keep in mind the materiality of an archive and its component parts, Elizabeth Edwards reminds us that "… much is to be gained analytically through understanding the specific ways in which different material forms both become meaningful and produce meaning themselves as they emerge from dense intersections of value and materiality."[40]

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[35] Smith 1938.

[36] A discussion of Woolley's articles for newspapers and magazines is outside the scope of this chapter. He wrote several articles per year for The Times and the Illustrated London News on Ur, as well as on Tell Atchana, and gave public lectures in the UK and the United States on both subjects.

[37] Woolley 1937, p. 4.

[38] Woolley employed 300 men in 1938 and 400 in 1939. Woolley 1939, p. 1; 1948, p. 1. The date of the image is uncertain, but most likely it was taken in 1938 or 1939, as excavations in the Level IV palace had not progressed thus far until 1938. Katharine Woolley died in 1945, thus ruling out a post-World War II date.

[39] Shields 2011.

[40] Edwards 2009, p. 136.

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