

## AREA IV – Archives of European Archaeology

### Antiquarian Traditions

Early modern science was, as Steven Shapin put it, “a diverse array of cultural practices aimed at understanding, explaining, and controlling the natural world”. Among these practices were also some dealing with excavated man-made artefacts, and we are interested in the scholars of Early Modern times (roughly 1500-1800) which were carrying out such scientific practices. The present proposal would like to deliver some thoughts for researching the history of archaeology before 1800.

#### 1.) Scholarly identity: What is an antiquarian?

As the term “Antiquarian” (Lat. “Antiquarius”) appears not to have been entirely common throughout early modern Europe for somebody digging up and collecting archaeological finds from the soil, I feel it would be a good idea to share one more or less strict definition about the “Antiquarian” and the “antiquarian tradition” in different countries and times. If Basilius Amerbach, Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc, Jacob Spon or Simon Sturion were Antiquarians, because they were focussing on the material remains, coins and the inscriptions of Roman Antiquity, how far would the term “Antiquarian” then also be applicable for scholars excavating and collecting prehistoric finds in 17th and 18th-c. Sweden or Germany? Are there scholars calling themselves “Antiquarians” in the (Latin) sources? What was the opinion of the contemporaries? The “Universal-Lexicon”, published by Johann Heinrich Zedler in 1732 in Halle and Leipzig, provides the following information: “*Antiquarius* was [!] the one, who was put in charge of the Antiquarium [i.e. the place where rare and old things were kept] and the [collection of] written documents. Moreover, he was the one, who copied old books. Additionally, in a library there were usually appointed four experienced in reading ancient Greek and three in [reading ancient] Latin.”

#### 2.) Contemporary context, non-teleological approach

In order to avoid a teleological view on the history of archaeology, we should be aware that we are archaeologists and historians of science researching about early modern scholars practicing archaeology, but we are not their scientific descendants. Non-teleological means: present archaeology has not developed necessarily straightforward and target-oriented from a pre-scientific antiquarian archaeology. Consequently, we should try to approach the scholars of the past in their own time, from their own beliefs and philosophies, which also means to explore and to understand their scientific, political, religious and social contexts. We are dealing with the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, which is the age of the Scientific Revolution, when scholars discovered new worlds through microscopes and telescopes and via global seafaring and became aware of their own modernity. Thus they began to define the past more clearly: Antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages, but also pagan prehistory.

#### 3.) Scientific practices

There were no archaeologists in Early Modern times, but theologians, physicians and lawyers at the universities, pastors in the rural parishes, or teachers in the urban Latin schools practicing a science non-professionally, which is called archaeology today, but was not, at least consistently, at that time. We have to trace distinct archaeological practices or methods which once have yielded more or new information about the Middle Ages and Antiquity and about the past before history, i.e. for prehistory beyond written sources. Prospecting, excavating, collecting and publishing, but also drawing, reading and writing are scientific practices which have produced a variety of written and pictorial sources for the history of archaeology. Reading, the quill in hand, for example, has left specific traces in books: marginalia, underlinings or annotations. Such annotated books are rare sources for the

individual reception of certain printed key texts in the history of archaeology, which are the more valuable if the historic owner of the book is known. Research in the history of collections provides us with correspondence mentioning and early inventories listing archaeological finds, their findspots and lucky finders of the past. Which leads us to the documentary track of AREA, because the written and printed sources to be developed and documented in libraries and archives will hopefully give answers to leading questions.

#### **4.) Leading questions**

- Why were the scholars digging and collecting and how were they going about it?
- How far can archaeological practices be conceived as new scientific methods to gain exceptional historical sources which might be able to assure the scholars of their own modernity?
- How far were archaeological practices in Early Modern times a matter of religious, regional or national identities?

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Dietrich Hakelberg