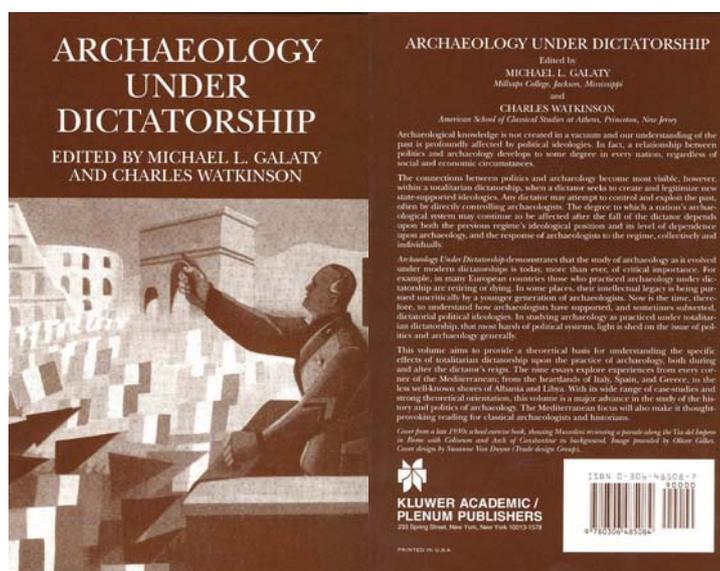


Galaty, M.L. & C. Watkinson. Eds. 2005. *Archaeology under dictatorship*. – New York, Kluwer Academic Press/Plenum Publishers

Book review by I.J.J. Nieuwland



Few topics in the history of science are still so laden with ambiguity as the interaction between science and totalitarianism. What lies behind this uneasy connection is the fact that most totalitarian regimes have called upon science to provide them with justification, be it historical, economical or ethnical. Therefore, science under totalitarianism is always political to some degree *per se*. Differences in the general attitude of the regime can make a difference, of course, but in certain branches of science it may be impossible to keep a completely depoliticised debate (even in a democratic society, it must be said). One such science is archaeology, for the simple reason that it studies the origins of human culture, a subject with which both fascism and Nazism have always harboured an obsession. With that in mind, it is hardly surprising that under those regimes, archaeological research has met with the greatest scrutiny and interference. But they have hardly been the only regimes to put certain demands on their archaeologists, as this volume illustrates.

However, one cannot help but feeling somewhat left in the dark after reading it. Whilst the individual contributions are, with two exceptions, well researched and evocative, this is not, in fact, a collection of articles about archaeology under dictatorship. Rather, it emphasises the relation between archaeology and Mediterranean politics, mainly in the inter-war period. Of seven cases, no less than four deal with Italian archaeological politics, either at home or abroad. The remaining three treat Atatürk's Turkey, Franco's Spain and post-war Greece.

That archaeology can be a 'two-edged sword', as Bettina Arnold postulates in her epilogue (p. 190), may well be true. The reality, however, is that it seldom is in a dictatorship. For it is not the actual state of archaeology that is significant, but its use by the regime – as virtually all the authors acknowledge. The dictator (or junta) will use those elements most useful to him. Arnold's example of Atatürk applying a fringe theory that happens to suit his purposes is exemplary, but it also emphasises that the actual status of the discipline, its discoveries and content, are neither here nor there. It is its application that is relevant. Not even the presence or absence of archaeological material may be that important: totalitarian regimes are quite capable of constructing their own heritage without aid of outsiders if the need arises.

The archaeological community is another matter, of course. They, like any other scientific or intellectual group, have the choice of committing themselves to the regime, or not. The extent to which they are forced to depends on a myriad of factors: the nature of the regime, its longevity, and a given nation's academic traditions that may or may not facilitate political influence. Much has been written about this subject, which makes it all the more unfortunate that the present volume hardly, if ever, touches on it beyond giving numerous examples of scientists struggling with the everyday repercussions of practicing their discipline under dictatorship.

Come to that, the type of dictatorship is also not insignificant. In those countries ruled by the ideological totalitarianism of fascism, communism and Nazism, archaeologists will meet decidedly different demands than under 'normal' dictatorships. Whereas in the former type a scientist will have to regard his work within the framework of ideological and political dogma, under the latter that factor will be far less important, or even absent. As the Greek and Turkish examples indicate, here it is arbitrarily (a dictator's whim, nepotism etc.) rather

than ideology that provides the difficulties. It is a crucial difference, and one that could have been emphasised more fully.

Kokkinidou & Nikolaidou's contribution about the Greek situation can probably best be described as a political rant. Quite apart from the very regrettable tendency to divide the world into saints (Karouzos) and sinners (Marinatos), the article appears to be part of the political bickering it mentions rather than a description of it. It does not help that the authors expect the reader to be aware of detailed information at one time, while suffocating him with minutiae at the other (e.g., p. 177).

Happily, most of the other contributions reach a higher standard. Ian Begg's description of the Italian digs at Tebtunis (Egypt) shows both the ideological preoccupation with 'Romanità' but, at the same time, the volatile nature of Italian politics of the 1930s and its capacity to compromise if the situation calls for it. It is the shortest of the essays here, but also the most enlightening. The same emphasis on 'Romanità' can be seen in Oliver Gilkes' essay about Albania, and he eloquently connects the history of the Albanian excavations with the fascists' historical myths. It makes the whole thing a lot more understandable, and it is a pity that other authors have chosen not to follow the same strategy.

However, like the remaining contributions, they show a regrettable lack of historical analysis within the framework of the title. What we find here, and in the remaining chapters, is various histories of Western European archaeology. The unifying particularity of these stories (the dictatorship) is obviously something that needs to be invented by the reader. Which is a pity, since it makes comparison, and therefore the analysis of the influence of totalitarianism over science, so much more difficult. This is also a matter for the editors, and it does give the impression of a rather arbitrary collection of contributions.

Probably the best essay of the lot is written by Wendy Shaw and treats the quest for the original Turks: 'whose Hittites, and why'? She does differentiate between dictatorships, and between a dictatorship and a democracy. This is especially relevant since Turkey's example proves that there may not be that much difference between the two, depending on the subject at hand. Here we have an authoritarian rather than a totalitarian regime, but one which also looks for a historical affirmation of its identity – with predictable consequences for its archaeologists. The young country adopted a mythology of appropriate ancientness: that of the Hittites. It is a clear example how archaeological interpretations can be moulded to support political needs.

This might have been a very worthwhile contribution to the history of archaeology in the 20th century. That it is not can mainly be attributed to poor editing and an inaccurate representation of the contents of the collection. For this is first and foremost a collection about Italian archaeology under fascist leadership, with some lateral explorations of the situation in Greece, Turkey and Spain. Bettina Arnold's closing essay about the 'Faustian bargain' of archaeology under dictatorship does not really offer much more than rather superficial remarks. For example, Arnold mentions that under a dictatorship, scientists have the choice to collaborate, oppose or ignore the regime – which seems a rather obvious remark. It is a pity that the one central question is never addressed: *i.e.*, what is the differentiating factor between the treatment of archaeology and that of other sciences (or scientific communities)? In other words, nowhere it becomes clear in which way the treatment of archaeology (and archaeologists) differs from that of irrespective which other science.

This volume presents some very worthwhile contributions to those wanting to read more about the situation of archaeology under Italian fascism. Those with the desire to learn more about the role of archaeology under dictatorship in general, should look elsewhere.

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¹ Note that Kluwer is merged with Springer in 2004.