

Interview with Douglass W. Bailey

Radu-Alexandru DRAGOMAN*

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Radu-Alexandru Dragoman (R.-A.I.D.): You are well known for the new approaches to the study of Neolithic figurines from the Balkans not only in what concerns their interpretation but also the manner in which they are exposed and published. Which are your recent and future projects on the topic of prehistoric art?

Douglass Bailey (DWB): In addition to *Prehistoric Figurines* (Bailey 2005) I am most pleased with the *Unearthed* project that produced a major exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts at the University of Norwich in the UK and a book (Bailey et al. 2010). It is not often that one has the freedom to follow new strands of thinking and writing without the normal restraint imposed by journal editors or publishing houses. The *Unearthed* project allowed me to do that with superb support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK and Dr Simon Kaner at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. The book turned out even better than I had expected and it remains my favourite piece of work; I think that it is still available on-line at Alibris.com. The exhibition was another matter; the museum curators had trouble allowing me to explore the full dimensions of juxtapositioning the images and objects that I had in mind; they refused to permit me to exhibit modern material culture (such as Barbie Dolls) alongside the Neolithic figurines and *J mon dog*. They had very clear ideas about what was appropriate for a modern museum and some of what I wanted to do did not fit into their plans. I learned that sometimes it is impossible to convince the people in power of an idea that you know deep inside you is groundbreaking and revolutionary.

In the end, I was able to mix together everything that I wanted in the book, though even here I had to fight to get the unusual imagery into print – they refused to let me use an image of Barbie on the cover because of the potential litigation from the Mattel Company. I hope that once the book appeared that the most intense worriers realized that they had been mistaken to limit the power of the exhibition. Maybe not. For what is it worth (and to reveal the issues at play in the creation of the exhibition and the book), I included in the book reconstructions of their letters of protest and condemnation. They did not like that either. If you read the back cover of the book, you will see what I intended: to place before the reader/viewer a series of relatively disorganized objects and to force the reader/viewer to come up with their own understanding of the material. The book is like an excavation; the reader/viewer has to process the images and text as if they were artefacts.

Most of my more recent published work has explored wide dimensions of representation, not only with figurines but also with other elements of the material past. As I write this, I am preparing a small installation of my photographs of figurines for the Badè Museum in Berkeley, California. I am mounting six images, each of a Neolithic figurine held in an unusual and highly unscientific way; I have published similar images in other places (e.g., Bailey 2008). Like most of the work that I do now, I started taking those photographs with nothing more than a hunch that the process of making the

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images would produce a result that was stimulating, though I really was not sure what the result would be. Even when I saw the original prints some time ago, soon after I took them, I couldn't see everything that was in them or what I might possibly do with them. In the Badè show I am working with the idea that I have published elsewhere (most clearly in Bailey 2012), that Neolithic figurines played a role (probably subconscious) in the ways that historic and modern Europe understands the human body, particularly the female form; for me the exciting challenge is to make this point with images and not with text or obvious narrative. The images that I have selected for the show all present a clearly female figurine in the grasp of a modern human hand, specifically as if the hand is muting or covering the mouth or the head or the body of the figurine. The idea emerged after the museum asked me to do the show. I went through the 60 or 70 images that I had of these objects and picked out what I thought were the most interesting images: the ones that made me stop and think when I looked at them. Unexpectedly, all of the ones were of figurines tightly held (almost restrained) in the modern hand. An idea of controlling female body worked its way into my mind. That will be the message of the installation, though I am not sure how explicit I will be about telling the spectators that this is what they should see; I prefer that they find their own patterns and meanings.

The Badè show is flattering; I was surprised to be asked to mount the exhibition, but gratified that someone found my alternative take on the material to be worth showing to a wider audience. I first wrestled with non-standard representations of Neolithic figurines in *Prehistoric Figurines* (Bailey 2005) when I included four images at the very start of the book, before any title pages or table of contents. I presented them without captions or explanations. I wanted the reader/viewer to engage the images and let their reactions run in whatever direction they did, before I tainted their mind with my own ideas. When I was working on that book (on sabbatical at Stanford University's Archaeology Center), I read James Agee and Walker Evans' 1941 work *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. That book famously starts with a series of Evans' images unhindered by captions or explanations. The images make the reader of *Famous Men* plunge into the material without any preliminary context or statement of the writer's and photographer's intention. I wanted to do the same thing, though as you will know, my images manipulated the figurines in unusual ways and made connections to contemporary art.

When *Prehistoric Figurines* appeared I was still at a relatively insecure point in my career, and I was concerned about what other respected specialists thought about my work. I remember hearing that one of the main European experts (one whose opinion I valued) had found the book to be "clever" but nothing more significant. Soon after that I realized that it was a sure way to insanity (and intellectual limitation) to get hung up on what other specialists thought about one's work. Since then, I have taken what some may see as a more selfish line by making work (articles, books, book chapters, conference presentations) for my own reasons and intentions (thus satisfying my own desires) and not according to other's perceptions or restrictions. I am happy doing that, though it has meant that many people either don't like what I make or sometimes feel threatened by it. That's fine with me. I understand that I may now be in a privileged position as a Full Professor with Tenure and that perhaps this allows me to do unusual things. On the other hand, innovative and original work should always be given space and encouragement. Sometimes we fail when we try to push originality too far; this sort of failure is something to be praised. We do not make significant progress unless we have failed again and again. Of course this is a paradox, but it is the secret to original thinking and work. If we do not try to make provocative work, then we are wasting our time. Who wants just another rendition of the standard argument: in my case, I am not interested in another typology of Hamangia figurines or another debate about whether or not Marija Gimbutas' Mother Goddess interpretation is correct or not.

R.-A.I.D.: Between 1998 and 2005, together with Dr. Radian-Remus Andreescu from the National Museum of Romania History in Bucharest, you led the Southern Romania Archaeological Project; also, you had numerous contacts with the Romanian archaeologists and gave a series of lectures at the University of Bucharest, at the "Vasile Pârvan" Archaeology Seminar at the Faculty of History. Retrospectively, how do you evaluate the results and eventually the consequences of this project? What can you tell us from your personal experience about the socio-political aspects of these researches and meetings: e.g., the philosophy and research agendas pursued by the Romanian and

British partners, the different academic and financing systems, the power structures and relations within the project but also the Romanian academic milieu, etc.?

DWB: A full answer to your questions would require a book on its own! About SRAP, we are still working to finish analyses and to write a final report. Luckily, individual specialists have published their work as it has become ready for dissemination, and we are hoping to get a final publication completed by the end of 2015. International collaborations are strange creatures, though maybe this is not the right metaphor. I love collaborating with other people, learning other ways of thinking, of working, and of addressing a common topic (e.g., the Neolithic of southeastern Europe). One of the good things about large, international collaborations is that very different perspectives are brought together in a high pressure and intensive process of working and living together. Whether we admit it or not, we all have our own agendas about what we want to accomplish in our work. These agendas can have many parts: personal, career-advancement, ego, financial, intellectual, and on and on. At times, these goals are left unspoken: such and such a collaboration will help me get a promotion at work, or will give status to me and to my professor or to my institute or museum or university, or will provide me relief from being at home arguing with a spouse or taking care of the kids.

Different regional or national schools of archaeology (or of any other academic or intellectual activity) have their own standards, intentions, rules, personalities, codes of conduct, and expectations. Earlier in my career I could recognise these pretty well, but I was very ambitious and arrogant and didn't always say the right things to the right people. Looking back on it, I think that I even enjoyed aggravating people, of putting difficult conversations in play. I think that time has made me a little more diplomatic, though that is not for me to judge. Having said that, I have never liked systems of power (on excavations or in institutes or universities) in which some people are given authority and high position because of their academic lineage, the colour of their skin, their gender, or their age (and not because of their abilities or experiences).

On top of that, I remain convinced that students and younger colleagues should throw all of their energies into attacking the theories, conclusions, and methods of their senior professors and advisors. Find the weaknesses in your professor's interpretation and then write something better in its place. For me this is the healthiest and most robust way to do science (and social science and humanities research); the great discoveries come from this process. It is not for the faint of heart, however. The alternative way to do science is for each professor's students to spend all of their energies repeating the words of the professor and defending him (or her) against all attacks. The result is the hagiography of the senior figures in a field of study. Their failings and weaknesses are excused, and the overall result is both a poor mechanism for advancing thought and a system that rewards the obsequious and weak. I believe that this system is indefensible and nothing more than intellectual nepotism and scientific immorality.

You asked about working as a foreign archaeologist. We descend on sites as if aliens from another planet. This is true both of foreign teams, such as the British one that I lead at SRAP, but also of local Romanian teams from Bucure ti or from Alexandria. We have to find a way to connect to the past that we are examining. One of the great tragedies of the formal cultural and scientific systems that give out permits and funding in many countries is that permits and funding are usually limited to only a short period (often three years). It is impossible for anyone to know a site, a landscape, or a body of material satisfactorily in three years. For me, it was only after visiting the Teleorman Valley for six or seven years that I slowly started to know what was happening there. By that time, it was almost impossible to raise more money to work.

I look at my work in Alexandria and my earlier work in Bulgaria both as archaeological projects and as social, political and personal engagements. Part of the necessary result of digging a site is to process the material, to analyse the data, and to present the results to the public with as much honesty and efficiency as possible. Having said that, there is a huge "other" space of these projects that exist outside of the physical processes of digging, recording, drawing, mapping, photographing, measuring, investigating the site and its material and natural contents. In this other space we will find a richer set of relationships and daily acts and negotiations. In many ways, I find the latter to be as exciting if not more exciting than the acts of excavation and analysis. For example,

running a field project means that you will spend most of your time and energy in the mayor's office or in discussion with the owner of a restaurant or with the local labourers. I love being in the field as much for these communications and connections as or any "higher" scientific exercise. Soon after starting to work on SRAP, I realized the personal and cultural value of connecting with the people of the local village and town. Some of that became the series of photographs that I took in the afternoons once we had finished work for the day at the site or in the museum. The Muzeul Județean Teleorman (MJT) has a set of these images and I am as proud of them as I am of the excavation or publication or conference sessions. You can see the images online at <http://dougbaileyphotography.yolasite.com/>.

R.-A.I.D.: Are you taking into consideration new fieldwork research in the near future?

DWB: The answer depends what you mean by "fieldwork research". I am less enthusiastic about starting new excavations than I was earlier in my career. I understand that it is an essential part of what we do as archaeologists. However, maybe we need to re-position the practice of archaeology within the broader study of humankind. The big topics that we study (time, cause and effect, change, social structure, technology, human and group identity) are the same topics that many other disciplines and specialists study. I do not see why we separate the archaeologist from the poet from the graphic artist from the musician from the sculptor. We can only gain by working in other areas of method, approach and thought. A lot of my most recent work explores these connections and tries to push beyond the standard boundaries of archaeology and of art. Three recent publications are montage-chapters (Bailey 2103, 2014a, 2015) that disrupt otherwise standard books of traditional, textual, academic writing. I plan to continue that type of work, which I see as a way of "going beyond" the limits of the standard disciplines of archaeology but also of art (for more details, see Bailey 2014c).

A current and strong desire I have is to work with the concept of the archive. Part of this comes from the discipline of visual anthropology and the way that the museum collections of the world contain objects and images and recordings that were accumulated over a long period of time in grand projects of recording and classification. Usually building an archive was the work of European countries as they took control of what some would call the third world. In other places the recording and collecting was carried out by the people who controlled the ways that knowledge was created, and thus who controlled much of how history and nationalism developed in hegemonic fashions. I am thinking here of nationalist political arbiters of culture and heritage (and this applies both to western and non-western countries). The fascinating part of the archive is that even though many people see archives as passive and inert collections of long dead cultures or communities, in reality archives are active and vocal. Recent work in ethnography and visual anthropology has shown how these active archives are alive and can fight back against long histories of abuse and colonization. If I were to start a new project now, it might focus on archaeological, ethnographic, and photographic archives. If it were to be in Romania, then I would want to look at the last 100 years and the way that photography and the mass-media constructed a series of politically motivated and, at times, highly abusive, versions of realities (though I would include equal treatment to periods and regimes before and after December 1989).

At a more general level, the goal of anything in which I want to invest my efforts and time is to use parts of the past (artefacts, sites, interpretations, inter alia.) to create new work and new meanings which have the power to stand apart, disarticulated from the past. This means letting go of the past and defamiliarizing ourselves from the objects we study that we usually connect to the past. I have written about this in my article "Art // archaeology // art: letting-go beyond" (2014c). I understand that to many people what I am arguing for appears to be very non-archaeological. From my perspective (and in light of what I have said in answer to your earlier questions) all of this work (on archives and on disarticulated the past) is archaeological, particularly as it is a different way to understand what we are supposed to do with this stuff that we call "the past".

Much of my thinking on this comes from the realization that archaeologists suffer badly from the disease of excavation-mania. While some projects are specific and valuable and follow clear research goals and questions, many do not. In too many places, I have been appalled that some

archaeologists spend their careers in an overly competitive frenzy to see who can excavate the most sites. To dig like this is a cultural crime. Perhaps, the people who are doing this (the archaeological maniacs) are insecure about their own professional and personal abilities and about their positions within their institutions and professional societies. They dig and dig and dig as if to fill in the holes in their self-esteem. So many of these excavations are unpublished; most have lacked modern analytic examination of the material. Look in almost any storage room in a museum and you will see the results of this mania for digging: 1000s of bag of unanalysed material.

Until I finish doing that I can do to bring our work SRAP to publication, I will not excavate again. It would be immoral. Having said that, it has been difficult to get the funding that we need to finish the analysis; this is despite the extraordinary support of the local museum (MJT) and its current director, Pavel Mirea, a man who has done more than anyone in the project to produce what results we have disseminated so far, and who really is the main machine within the project. His work humbles me. Not unexpectedly, not all of the senior members of the project have followed his lead. One expert held his analysis hostage from us until we agreed to pay him for his work, when our project we did not have the money to pay any of the specialists for their efforts; another colleague liked to sit on the side of the trench and make inane and unhelpful comments while the rest of the team toiled in the heat and the dust.

R.-A.I.D.: One more question about politics. The project M gura Past and Present, co-directed with Dr. Steve Mills from Cardiff University in the United Kingdom, was part of the pan-European project Art-Landscape Transformations (2008-2011), financed by the European Union. The project was based on the modern village of M gura, in the Teleorman County, and involved archaeologists, historians, ethnographers, artists, photographers, and film-makers from various corners of the world, on the one part, and, on the other part, people from the village, from school children to politicians. However, from all these "interventions", as you coined them, it seems that the consideration of the political contexts and dominant ideologies from the recent and contemporary past of the M gura village is missing: in this regard I would remind the fact that the lives of the people from the rural communities from Teleorman were affected by de modernist politics of the Communist regime, and later, both before and after Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, they were profoundly affected by neoliberal politics. Why this absence of the political? I would add one more question: what change/changes brought the project to the lives of the people from M gura village or at least for the local participants?

DWB: These are strong and welcome questions. You assume that the "political contexts and dominant ideologies" of M gura were missing from the daily practice of the work and from the output. How do you know, Alecu? Let me try answer in a more polite way, while still acknowledging and appreciating the seriousness of your question (which I fully respect). There are at least two senses of the political: one is the Big Politics of which you speak – Ceauseșcu, totalitarian socialism, the Warsaw Pact, the United States, neoliberalism, the European Union, and the recent and current national, regional and village-level political actors and acts, laws and statues, arrests and hegemonic acts bullying some and privileging others. Another sense of the political is with a lower case letter "p" in political; it is about the regular, almost unnoticed, human interactions, collaborations and obstructions that come with each day that we live, with each morning that we wake to, with each bowel movement we make, each hello to a friend, and each middle finger we raise to an enemy. This is the level of actual life; the Big P politics is something else. To answer your question, therefore, I would reply that the political was always present in the work that we did, though it was the lower case "p" version of political.

To your second question, let me ask you this: why do you assume that we (or I) had any intention to change the lives of the inhabitants of M gura? I hope that I am not that arrogant. All that any of us can do in our lives and our works is to live and work as we feel is appropriate for ourselves in each of the endless contexts in which we negotiate and contest the world that we live in. Again, academics, archaeologists, scientists (not unlike Big P politicians) often fool themselves to think that they are going to change the world, or in your question, to "change the lives" of the people of M gura. To think that a project can affect change in this way and at this level is naive, and I cannot imagine that you, Alecu, as the politically and theoretically informed person you are, would think that

this could be the case. Having said all of that, I do believe strongly that our lives are constantly being changed by the situations that we place ourselves in. The more dynamic and unexpected is the situation, the greater the potential for change. So, I am in debt to the inhabitants of M gura and to the many people who I have worked with (both in agreement and in opposition) while in Romania. Bulgaria is another question, though even there, their treatment of me and of our project there in the 1990s formed an important part of my own personal and professional growth. I continue to thank them for that.

The more informative question is not how I have changed them, but how they have changed me. The answer is unreachable, as one can never know with any certainty how any one event or contact or communication actually affects us, shapes who we are, or conditions what we do. We fool ourselves when we see cause and effect in such simplistic ways; this is true both in terms of our own positions in life and science, and it is one of the reasons that I do not think that it is possible for us to ever determine with any objective security why events or developments in the past happened as they did. Thus, questions about the origins of the Neolithic (itself a term of gross over-generalization) are not interesting to me. Don't take this the wrong way. I love to read what people are thinking about this question (and I am in their debt for their work on it), but it, like most other research questions in traditional archaeology, is not tied to the day-to-day reality of life. I understand that you want to ask me about the films that we made in M gura, and those films relate closely to this discussion. Is that your next question?

R.-A.I.D.: Yes indeed, but first I would shortly like to clarify part of my previous question because, apparently, I was misunderstood: there has never been in my mind the idea that the project should have changed the lives of the people in the village of M gura, but on the contrary, to bring into discussion, as a subject for reflection, the consequences, intended or not, that researchers' presence and actions might have had for the participants and villagers; in other words, to reflect on the ways we approach our Neighbor and the responsibility we have for our "interventions". But you have already addressed this, so I turn to another question. Apparently unusual for an archaeologist, you participated in the elaboration of a few films – *Eternity was Born in the Village* and *Eleven Minutes and Forty Seconds in the Neolithic*? I saw the first one, produced in the framework of the M gura Past and Present project, at the very moment of its release and I was impressed by the sensibility with which the two directors, Peter Biella and Iván Drufovka, approached the people from the village of M gura; I didn't see the second film (but I hope to see it). Which is the story behind the making of these two films?

DWB: Again I am fascinated by the complex mystery and challenges inherent in the acts of representation, particularly visual representation. The film *Eternity was Born in the Village* was part of our response to the requirements that I was given by the organizers of the larger EU project, *Art-Landscape Transformations*. Archaeologists, like most academics and intellectuals, are immensely egotistical, and our systems of funding, as well as the grant- and permit-giving institutions, control work and thought often in dangerous ways. We have developed a discipline in which we play god with time, its measurements, and the connection of human action through time. As prehistorians, we think nothing of talking about cause and effect over centuries or millennia. Many of my colleagues have the capability and confidence to do this with ease and without second thought; more power to them, and I enjoy learning of their successes. For me, I feel that there are other ways to think and to work.

At the time that I received the EU grant, I had just started my job at San Francisco State and Peter Biella, one of my new colleagues, was (and still is) a world-renowned ethnographic filmmaker. As you have mentioned, I used the funds for the M gura Past and Present project to take as many non-archaeological creative "makers" to M gura as I could afford to take within the limits of the grant that we were given. Peter was one of the makers and he brought his colleague Iván Drufovka. My instructions to Peter and Iván were the same ones that I gave to each of the project participants: use your specific set of skills and knowledges to evoke the place and people of M gura. If you think about it, this is really the same thing that any leader of an excavation team asks of his or her team members: use your scientific skills to represent a past place in the present, whether that representation is with animal bones, pollen, ceramics, lithics, or other materials.

Peter and Iván started filming a week before I arrived, and the day that I pulled into the village from Otopeni, they showed me what that had shot up to that point. It was stunning! My only further instruction to them was that they must not introduce any sense of a narrative story-line or plot into the film. In the early edits of *Eternity*, they stuck to this, but in the later versions, a story-line emerged. But that was their decision; they were the filmmakers. I had to let it rest.

As they were working on their film, I asked Peter if he would help me to make another (unplanned) film and this is what became the second film that you mentioned: *Eleven Minutes and Forty Seconds in the Neolithic*. The larger EU project had what I thought was a rather grandiose title, *Art Landscape Transformation*, and the goal of that larger project was to integrate art practice within the study of the transformations of the landscape over long periods of time. In talking about the project and what we might do in Romania, I repeatedly bumped against the European scientific idea that landscape is transformed over long periods of time (1000s or 10,000s of years) and that one of the things that archaeologists do is to record and reconstruct changes in environment and landscape over these inhuman spans of time. The more I thought about it, the more uncomfortable I felt. Increasingly, I came to the opinion that our long time-span versions of human history are not human at all. So, I asked Peter to help me shoot and edit a film that would suggest to the viewer a better scale of time passage: a timescale that matters to people in real-time. I wanted the result to show that what matters in life (i.e., the scale of transformation for humans) happens in the real-time of everyday, minute-by-minute time, and that our scientific, archaeological chronologies and cultural phasings of sites are something else altogether (though they have huge value in archaeological research).

To attempt to make this point with a film, we set up a video camera on the corner of one of the back alleys in M gura and then for 20-minutes we let the camera run on its own without any change of perspective or focus. We did this at four different times over one 24-hour period. Once we had the four films, we stuck them together so that when the film is shown (as it was at the 2011 meetings of the Society of American Archaeologies in Sacramento, California), the viewers see all four films in real time arranged in four quadrants on a screen. When you watch the screen, you see the same place (the alley) but in four different times, but all at the same time. Some parts of the place stay the same, others change. The result is unusual (to say the least), but it is exactly what I think we all should be doing: trying new and otherwise unacceptable processes to open up the way that we think about the past and the present, and particularly the way that we represent place through time (for me this last process is one of the things that archaeologies spend a lot of time doing). At a conference in Chicago a couple of years later, I gave a lecture about this larger goal: "Going beyond and letting go: non-archaeological art and non-artistic archaeology" and the direct link is as follows: https://www.academia.edu/4218265/Video_lecture_Going_beyond_and_letting_go_non-archaeological_art_and_non-artistic_archaeology_2013_NB_click_more_to_get_link.

A final spin-off from that *Eleven Minutes* video is an article (to be published this year) in which I have taken the whole idea farther via two-dimensions (Bailey 2015). The article is another montage-chapter from an otherwise standard academic book, and the goal, as with my other recent work, has been to use images and their juxtapositioning to force the reader/viewer to come up with their own thoughts about the material (and not to be told by me what to think).

R.-A.I.D.: Recently, *Ruin Memories*, a project in which you took part and I constantly followed with great interest, came to an end. Tell us more about this project in general and especially about your topics of interest within it.

DWB: *Ruin Memories* is an extraordinary project run by a small group of innovative archaeologists and thinkers, and led by Bjornar Olsen from the University of Tromsø in Norway. It is not for me to say what that team has been trying to do, though I agree with you that the project is superb and worth following (go to <http://ruinmemories.org> for a full view). I find exciting the way that *Ruin Memories* works with those parts of modernity that have been abandoned, discarded, victimized, made redundant, left to decay, and neglected. The connection to archaeology is very strong, though the link is through that process I mentioned above of stepping outside of our standard way of thinking about the past and about human action. Though there are many points of fascination with the *Ruin*

Memories work, I have been most drawn to the way that they (re)present their subject of study. Their use of photography and text is careful and powerful. I envy them and what they are doing; it is some of the best work in play at the moment.

R.-A.I.D.: Apropos of the archaeology of the recent past, in 2009, in the first issue of the *Buletinul Muzeului Judeean Teleorman. Seria arheologie*, you published a very welcome and interesting plea for an archaeology of the material traces of the recent and contemporary past of the Teleorman region. Do you have any novelties to tell us?

DWB: Thank you for asking about that article (Bailey 2009); you prompted me to go back and reread it. While I do not want to take up the space here to repeat what I wrote there, I am just as adamant in defence of the comments that I made at the time. At the top of these is an understanding that archaeology only exists in the present, and that the material and the landscape that we study only exist in the present. The consequence of this is that archaeology is a methodology that can be applied to any situation in any period. As a method of analysis, archaeology is particularly valuable in the study of the modern world and the very recent past; as you know, this is more commonly called the archaeology of the contemporary past as developed most clearly by Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas in their important 2001 book *The Archaeology of the Contemporary Past* (Routledge) and which is also in play in the *Ruin Memories* project that you just asked me about. One of the most valuable consequences of this approach is that the application of archaeological methods to contemporary places, sites, events, people and encounters causes us to become unfamiliar with a place, site, event, person or encounters which we otherwise would normally know and understand almost without thinking.

As an example, I remember that during one of the excavation seasons at SRAP, we were digging the Cri -Dude ti-V dasta site at M gura. The excavation was near a fresh water spring that was next to the road to the site, and so we drove past the spring each day. The spring was a busy place and many people would stop and fill up bottles and large plastic containers. One morning when we drove past, we saw that three gypsy wagons were pulled up and a group of half a dozen gypsies were camped out there. After a couple of days, the gypsies moved on. Though they were gone, they had left behind a lot of garbage. One of graduate students on our project (Chris Witmore, now a professor at Texas Tech University) suggested that we apply the archaeological technique of a field survey to the gypsy garbage. Chris led a group of students in mapping the "site" and in collecting, bagging and tagging the "artefacts". What we did not expect was that when the work day was over and Chris and his group were ready to load their "finds" into the cars to drive back to the museum in Alexandria, a heated debate (an argument, even) would storm up about whether or not the drivers should be allowed to take the finds (deemed by some to be trash left by an unwelcome element of society) in their cars. From what was a simple, small project in the archaeology of the contemporary past (or even a straightforward ethnoarchaeological experiment about mobile groups and patterns of material culture discard), there emerged a very sharp discussion heavily soiled with racist attitudes to gypsy populations in this region and in Romania in general.

R.-A.I.D.: Imitating the theme of the section "A life in books" from the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, I would ask you: if you were to choose five books which strongly impacted the way you understand and practice archaeology, which would they be and why?

DWB: By this time in the interview, I doubt that it will be a surprise that my choices will not be all archaeological works. However, I would start with two books that changed the way I (and many others) thought about what archaeology is and how it should be practiced. The first is Ian Hodder's 1981 *Symbols in Action* (Cambridge). At a very personal level, the book was one of five or so on the list of required summer reading sent to me as a student about to enrol in the Masters in Archaeology degree at Cambridge in the summer of 1985. I struggled to see how much of Hodder's book was archaeological (my BA had been in Classics, and my grounding in archaeological theory, if it existed at all, was very much of the Lewis Binford, New Archaeology tradition). As I read *Symbols in Action*, but more so, as I worked through the intense yearlong MPhil program, I realized that archaeology was a powerful social and political discipline that had a vital role to play in life beyond any simple method to reconstruct a past. Hodder's focus on symbols and their meanings in their shifting contexts was

foundational for much of how the best current archaeological interpretation is now practised and the book's arguments and examples had a profound effect on me. The fact that Hodder was at Cambridge and that as MPhil students we had lectures and supervisions with him compounded the impact. There were other important things happening at Cambridge at the time, and together it was a sensational time to be a young student of archaeology.

The second book I didn't read until sometime later, maybe in 2001: Michael Shank's 1992, *Experiencing the Past* (Cambridge). Unlike my position of theoretical naivety when I had read *Symbols*, I picked up *Experiencing the Past* with a pretty good idea what I was looking for and what might be in the book. By 2001, I was good friends with Michael, and we had talked about a lot of common interests. In fact we had crossed over at Cambridge; he was doing his PhD and I was doing mine, though he was miles ahead of me (really on a different plateau). Regardless, in 2001, I had not read his 1992 book, but I was increasingly unhappy with the versions of complete and unfragmented pasts that continued to be produced and praised in the archaeological publishing and teaching worlds. By the late 1990s Michael had established himself as a leader in archaeological theory and interpretation. While the breadth of his impact often is traced to the two books that he wrote with Chris Tilley in 1987 (*Reconstructing Archaeology and Social Theory and Archaeology*), there is more value in his other work, particularly on representation, and *Experiencing the Past* is central to that contribution. I was doing the major part of my research for *Prehistoric Figurines* in 2001 and 2002, and thus, I was spending a lot of time thinking about visual representation and the archaeology of art. I came upon Michael's 1992 book just when my appetite for radically different approaches to material culture and to the past was at its hungriest. There is another book which could be slotted in here as an alternate for *Experiencing the Past*; that is the book that Michael wrote with the performance researcher Mike Pearson: *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001; Routledge). Both books are required reading for all of my graduate students, and I turn to each volume from time to time for reminders and for inspiration.

The third and fourth books, neither archaeological works, have had a lasting impact on me, particularly in my current work in visual archaeology and visual anthropology. The first of these is James Agee and Walker Evans's 1941 landmark volume *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Houghton Mifflin). As you will know, *Famous Men* was the final outcome from an assignment that *Fortune Magazine* gave to Agee and Evans in 1936 to examine tenant farmers in the American south during the dust bowl and the American Depression. Agee was an author and Evans a photographer, and the book that they eventually produced is a sensational and revolutionary work of documentation and agit-prop declaration. The book has so much that still appeals to me at very deep levels: the juxtapositioning of image and text (and of text-with-text); the exquisite photographs; the intimate connection (invasion almost) by Agee and Evans into the lives of three tenant families; and the strong, yet unspoken, political statement about the state of the people in this part of the country. It is as close to a perfect book as I know, and only slightly more powerful than Robert Frank's 1955 *The Americans*, which I would add to my list if I had a slot for a sixth volume.

My choice for a fourth book is more academic and straightforward in its message: John Tagg's 1988 collection *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Palgrave Macmillan). Here the message is strong and sophisticated, examining the ways that photographic representation creates truths and fact. For me, I could swap the word archaeology or artefact for photography and print anywhere in Tagg's book and the message would be the same. There are other books in the social and political sciences that I could include here in a general set of late 20th century arguments about the construction of truth and the exploitation of the past in the present. I included *Burden* because it focused on photography and visual culture (main interests of mine), and because I read it at a critical time in my own intellectual education when my mind was eager for fertilization.

A fifth book? Either one of Emile Zola's novels from his twenty-volume *Rougon-Macquart* cycle: probably *Nana* (1880) or *L'Assommoir* (1877) or something from the Beat authors, maybe William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) or Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). There is so much of rich nutritional value in any of these last four titles, that it is hard to do each of them justice here, let alone choose one over the others. In any event, I will not try to flavour your impression of them – go out and read them yourself if you have not already. They are all experiments in documentary

representation (in fact I have included a lengthy quote from one of Zola's novels as an "artefact" in a piece of archaeological disruption that will be published later this year; Bailey 2015). From Zola's naturalistic description of French life in the late 19th century to the legend (and thus, of course, of fact) that Kerouac typed out his book on one continuous reel of paper, all of it is luscious and food for our intellectual and creative digestive tracts. Part of the attraction is that these authors and the rest of these movements were kicking some serious ass in a particular and wondrous way, a way that much of society (particularly) high society and the intellectual gatekeepers of literature looked down upon with tremendous disdain. The message I take from these sorts of situations (and the same would apply to Shanks' or Hodder's works) is that if the people in power hate what you are doing and try to undermine you and prevent you from doing your work in the alternative way that you are doing it, then you are on the right track and you should push on with all energy and confidence. The obverse holds as well: if your work does not disturb anyone, then you need to reassess what it is that you are doing and how you are going about your life.

R.-A.I.D.: Finally, in my turn, I put the same question you asked from other archaeologists you interviewed: if you were to live forever on a desert island, what book or books and what luxury items would you like to take with you?

DWB: Excellent! Considering that I will have food and drink (including endless palinka from my friends in M gura), then I can concentrate on other matters (though I would ask for a fully equipped kitchen – good knives, an excellent gas cooker, an ice-machine, and a blender to make frozen daiquiris). I would want to use my time on the island to explore some other medium of creative work. I know nothing about music. I do not play any instrument. I can't even read music. I have always found that cello music affects me in powerful sensory ways, especially its acoustics and physical vibrations. So, I would ask for a cello, cello music, and a sympathetic cello teacher (probably someone who would also be skilled in massage and other techniques of mind and body relaxation). Books? Not sure about this. We spend so much time reading and writing in our academic and archaeological jobs, I wonder if it would be a relief not to read anything. In the place of text-based books, I would ask for a collection of the most important early graphic novels: the works of Frans Masereel, Lynd Ward, and Milt Gross; also a complete series of Mad Magazine. If that were granted, then I would also need some sort of drawing equipment, so that I could create some visual work about my world on my island.

◆ Selected publications

Books:

D.W. Bailey, A. Cochrane, J. Zambelli, 2010, *Unearthed: a Comparative Study of Jomon Dog and Neolithic Figurines*, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich.

D.W. Bailey, A. Whittle, D. Hofmann (eds.), 2008, *Living Well Together: Sedentism and Mobility in the Balkan Neolithic*, Oxbow, Oxford.

D.W. Bailey, 2005, *Prehistoric Figurines: Representation and Corporeality in the Neolithic*, Routledge, London.

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D.W. Bailey, 2000, *Balkan Prehistory: Exclusion, Incorporation and Identity*, Routledge, London.

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D.W. Bailey, 2014c, Art // archaeology // art: letting-go beyond, in I. Russell, A. Cochrane (eds.), *Art and Archaeology: Collaborations, Conversations, Criticisms*, Springer-Kluwer, New York, p. 231-250.

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D.W. Bailey, 2007, The anti-rhetorical power of representational absence: faceless figurines in the Balkan Neolithic, in C. Renfrew, I. Morley (eds.), *Material Beginnings: a Global Prehistory of Figurative Representation*, McDonald Institute, Cambridge, p. 117-126.

D.W. Bailey, 2006, Studying the Neolithic: an argument against generalization, *Cultura i Civiliza ie la Dun rea de Jos (C l ra i, Romania)*, 22, p. 85-96.

D.W. Bailey, 2005, Beyond the meaning of Neolithic houses: specific objects and serial repetition, in D.W. Bailey, A. Whittle, V. Cummings (eds.), *(un)settling the Neolithic*, Oxbow, Oxford, p. 95-106.

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Note: for a full list of publications and downloadable pdfs, see <https://sfsu.academia.edu/DougBailey>.