**Archaeology games the Academy**

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The other speakers in this session will amply demonstrate the power of archaeology to enrich the impoverished database, to muddy the uncomplicated narrative, to react to apparently unanswerable questions. Other disciplines — philology, history, religious studies, and so on —recognize this with increasing ease of manner, and more honest and productive relationships exist — not least through the training of our graduate students who are in many ways more tolerant and certainly more eclectic than their mentors. That there remain pockets of resistance, there will be pendulum swings in fashion, and that Young Fogeys still exist, I do not deny. But things are better, healthier, vis-à-vis archaeology’s own place in the academy.

Byzantine archaeology will share in that overall rising of the boats, aided not least by this admirable effort to conceptualize and to promote what is a complex historical and material phenomenon. And it is something we discussed at the last meeting of this group that prompts my few remarks today. The question was raised: does Byzantine archaeology want to (or should it) draw lines around itself, create its own subdisciplinary structures — to ‘ghettoize’ it, was I think one unflattering term. Or, while developing better forms of communication and self-promotion, and more robust training for the young, should it seek instead to mix it up with all other brands of archaeology, cross-temporally and globally? Not to mention the growing crew of partners, not least in the sciences, with whom archaeologists increasingly work.

This is where my title comes in, ‘archaeology games the Academy’ with a capital ‘A’. Rather cheeky, I admit, for gaming has its element of tricking, of being a little shady. But where I think we can game the academy, in good conscience, is through archaeology’s remarkable elastic capacity.

This isn’t news to any of you, of course. That archaeology runs the gamut from the softest of the humanities to the hardest of the hard sciences may be an established cliché. But it remains true, and that is not the case for many other humanistic disciplines.

Archaeology’s ability to work with just about anyone — potentially — will benefit us enormously in the near future. Here’s where the ‘gaming’ comes in. It’s my impression, others can correct me, that universities and funding agencies, in tighter times, are looking to invest in larger-scale ‘constellations’ or ‘signature areas’, rather than the traditional, frequently silo-ed disciplines. Or they are looking for fresh and creative alliances between fields that don’t normally tend to talk.

Now this may be a ‘flavor of the month’ phase (disciplinary structures are not about to go away). But the taste could be in our mouth for a while, and it need not be an unpleasant one for us. Classified as a ‘humanities’ or ‘soft social science’, archaeology is an attractive ‘bridging’ partner (or at worst, a face saving partner), not least since — let’s face it — a lot of the energy is going to go into the hard sciences and engineering. Important areas for targeted funding are the environment (climate change), health sciences, computer visualization (to name just three). Collaborations with such fields are no ‘game’ for us, we already do this, and should do more.

Would we describe Byzantine archaeology as elastic? From yesterday’s presentations — which not only moved through time and space, but from various forms of fieldwork to conservation, to community partnerships — I would say yes. The field’s deep involvement with volatile sectors of the world and major questions of the moment — not least religious change, religious contact, religious conflict — is perhaps also a point to emphasize, when you are thinking of working the system.

So. We are in a fast changing ‘academic’ world, no going back. It is all out there to play for. Game away!