
ROMANCING THE STONES: ARCHAEOLOGY IN POPULAR CINEMA

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Abstract: This article looks at the depiction of archaeology and archaeologists in popular cinema. A number of key films are discussed to address the article's main themes of cultural appropriation and contested ground (encompassing treasure, the public, politics and gender). Archaeology in film cannot be divorced from the wider cultural contexts in which it operates and, though portrayals of archaeology and archaeologists are frequently unsatisfactory, a positive conclusion is attempted which seeks to understand the narrative drive of popular fiction and a long history of public exclusion from archaeology. Most of the films considered do not warrant labelling as great works of art, but they are part of a cultural form with perceptions to offer, able to stimulate debate within a vital framework of cultural practices by which identity – individual and social – is constructed and evolved.

Keywords: cinema, Eurocentrism, film studies, popular culture, treasure

Archaeology is about people; who they were, what their lives were like, ... it asks where we have been, where we are going.

Timeline (2003)

Archaeology is the search for facts, not truth. If you want truth, philosophy class is right down the hall ... X never marks the spot.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989)

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the portrayal of archaeology and archaeologists in popular film. A detailed discussion of the complexities of popular culture and film is precluded; suffice it to say that the term popular is here taken as reflecting mass-consumption, based on active choices by audience members, each bringing their own knowledge and judgement to bear (following Bourdieu 1984; see also Gramsci 1998; Hall 1998; Jones 1987; Willis 1995). Popular film then is a dialogue, a contest between commercial producers and viewers, each with their own agenda and social values, each with their own susceptibility of influence. The focus of the article is on the archaeological element within popular films but it does recognize that such films mediate other cultural issues, including sexuality and fantasy (Petrie 1993).

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Popular film has always had an uneasy relationship with the past and so with archaeology. It inherited this relationship from pre-cinematic popular culture particularly painting, drama and narrative fictions in magazines, newspapers and cheaply produced books (see for example Shohat and Stam 1994:114–121; Tatum 1988:109–111 for the dime novel's influence on the western; Wyke 1997:10–46 for the influence of the 1895 novel *Quo Vadis?* and the 1872 painting *Pollice Verso* on the Roman epic – the latter holds for the most recent Roman epic, *Gladiator*, see Landau 2000:24–25). Books and prints are popular cinema's cultural precursors from at least the fifteenth-century expansion in book printing and artists' prints (see for example Koerner 2002:18). These have a shared concern with the mass production and circulation of copies to reach a widespread audience. Books, prints and film are then resolutely concerned with mass-produced culture accessed by multiple audiences in different places, though each is ultimately based on a single, original work of art: the author's text, the artist's picture and the film-maker's negative.

These precursors influenced cinema from its earliest days and consequently the cinema experience has always been a means by which individuals have been led to think about the past, particularly in terms of what it means to be human. Such films focus not on material, factual accuracy but on making the past familiar, particularly in terms of human behaviour. The past is fictionalized and that fiction is reciprocally made 'real'. This links film to the debate that sees art and archaeology (as a representative of science) at odds because the latter searches for a single, objective, empirical truth whereas the former seeks imaginative responses (Woodward 2001:30–31). Film historian Edward Buscombe (1988:14) has observed that it is not enough to separate fact from fiction, 'we need to trace the process whereby reality imparts credibility to myth and myth charges reality with imaginative power'. Often then 'truth' becomes subordinate to narrative drive and a presumption of audience knowledge and understanding.

Even the most authentic of films can have their authenticity vitiated by the political context in which they are made (Haslam 2002:104), by the costs of production (money and time), and by the need for a commercial or propaganda return. Similar constraints also affect the public presentation of archaeology and it is also true that film-makers are often aware of the deliberateness of any distortion for the sake of narrative drama (Cadigan 1999; Landau 2000; Singer 1997). It is only in recent years that archaeology has tackled notions of a non-narrative constructed past, in both longer, historical perspectives of the discipline (e.g. Trigger 1989) and in particular case studies such as that of the Cerne Abbas Giant, Dorset, England (Darvill et al. 1999).

The general theme of the article, the conjunction (for some a disjunction) between archaeology and cinema is an increasingly analysed aspect of social/public archaeology on which there are a variety of perspectives (Day 1997; Russell 2002a). There is also a broad area of common ground that focuses on the exaggerated portrayals of archaeology. Though these criticisms are often valid the overall effect is to make a crisis out of a drama with a tendency to ignore deeper and more perceptive concerns about archaeology, its practice and development. This article seeks to review and focus on some of those deeper concerns within the

wider context of narrative consumption, hopefully striking a balance between avoiding an apologia for some decidedly 'ropey' films but recognizing the right of those outside archaeology to comment upon archaeology.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AND CONTESTED GROUND

What's yours is mine

The filmic portraits of Egypt form the classic and well-known arena for depictions of cultural appropriation and of controlling dangerous non-European cultures. Many of the films are well recognized as part of a wider phenomenon of 'Egyptomania' (Curl 1994; Daly 1994; Frayling 1992; Hamer 1993; Lant 1992; Meskell 1998a; Shohat and Stam 1994).

The profusion of films that deal with archaeology and archaeologists in Egypt cannot be reconsidered here. A few words are in order, however, to set the scene for a wider analysis of archaeology as cultural appropriation. Since the 1920s not a decade has passed without at least one film dealing with the horror possibilities of Egyptian archaeology. Usually this takes the form of a mummy story and invariably with the same basic title from *The Mummy* (1932) through to *The Mummy* (1999) and its sequel *The Mummy Returns* (2001). Sometimes in these films archaeologists do get to espouse archaeological wisdom (in the 1932 film *The Mummy*, the archaeologist Sir Joseph Whemple states: 'much more is learned from studying bits of broken pottery than from all the sensational finds. Our job is to increase the sum of human knowledge of the past'), but it is often as a foil for the supernatural elements to come.

However, even into the twenty-first century, what these mummy films retain is a depiction of archaeology as a colonial imposition by which cultural inheritance is appropriated (see Fig. 1). Ultimately they feed off a nineteenth-century western, colonial agenda, mixing Egypt's Pharaonic, Ptolomaic, Coptic and Islamic heritage to create an amorphous, imaginary past. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries western archaeologists were more than willing to emphasize the spectacular, the treasure and the arcane aspects of their discoveries and so readily added to the mix. Some films do permit Egyptians an interest in their past but usually this is through the veil of legend and superstition. In *The Mummy* (1999) the archaeological curator of the Cairo Antiquities Museum leads a secret sect – descended from the bodyguard of Ramses – pledged to defend the world from Imhotep (the Mummy). In *The Mummy Returns* one of the henchmen of Imhotep is the curator of Egyptian antiquities at the British Museum. Both these curators are depicted as Egyptians engaged in arcane activities, confirming their subservience to the western, colonial myth about Egypt and suggesting that only Europeans/Americans can truly understand the Egyptian past, through its appropriation and redefinition, often through the practice of archaeology. The persistence of this western cultural imperialism in popular culture has been usefully characterized by Shohat and Stam (1994) as 'unthinking Eurocentrism'. As they demonstrate, it is a concept equally applicable beyond the context of Egypt to the whole post-colonial cultural landscape.



Figure 1. The western appropriation of the Egyptian dead – the moment of discovery of the sarcophagus of Princess Ananka in *The Mummy* (UK 1959). As a consequence of this discovery the English archaeologist on the right will become the first victim of the Mummy. The fibreglass sarcophagus is now in the collections of Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Scotland, UK. Image supplied by the British Film Institute.¹

Egyptian archaeology fares little better in non-horror films. In the science-fiction adventures, *Stargate* (1994) and *The Fifth Element* (1997) otherwise plausible, historically-set archaeological investigations in Egypt are linked to visits by aliens and in the former, the Rosetta Stone proves to be a gateway to another universe. In *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) we see large-scale excavations under way at the City of Tanis, in the Egyptian desert. Often, but not exclusively, such forays are set in the 1920s or 1930s and so often display hundreds of Egyptians as the labouring force under foreign, imperial archaeological control (see Fig. 2). Things may be less overtly supernatural in these films but Egypt is still commodified and closely bound as a representation of the Oriental 'Other'. As Meskell (1998a:73) observed of the film *Stargate*: 'Egypt represents everything Other, everything we cannot fathom or explain, all things ritualized, sacrificed and sexual' and summed up in the film as the queered, extra-terrestrial Ra, like Egypt identified as inexplicable, unnatural and evil.

The English Patient (1997, adapted from the 1992 novel by Michael Ondaatje) powerfully evokes the spirit of archaeological enquiry between the two World Wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Partly set in Egypt it suggests that

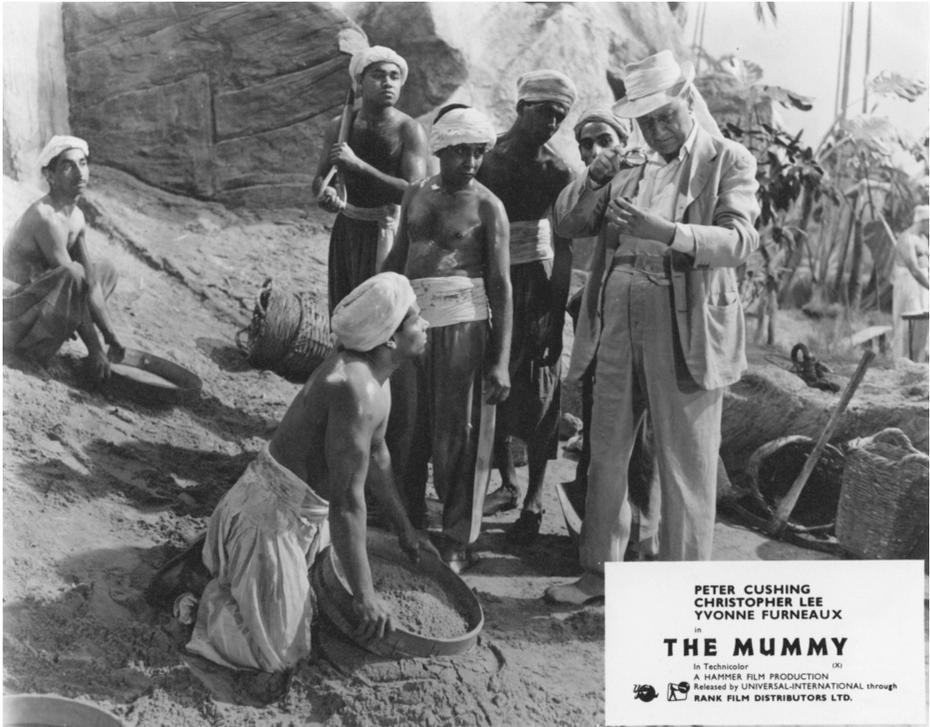


Figure 2. A scene from *The Mummy* (UK 1959) in which the ‘natives’ labour in ignorance while the English archaeologist claims the knowledge/treasure. The excavation amounts to little more than sifting through sand and the archaeologist employs a magnifying glass to make the detective analogy clear. Image supplied by the British Film Institute.

knowledge has no bounds but that its exploration, recording and understanding does, often leading to contested ownership and conflict. It is a story that is historically situated at the close of Egypt’s direct European colonial experience and so emphasizes the European appropriation and exploration of African culture through both cartography and archaeology. The map and the museum, along with the census, were the three key mechanisms of the grammar of colonial power, with archaeological pasts embedded in all of them (Meskell 1998b:3, following Anderson 1991:163). Eurocentric cinema uses the stock character of the ‘discoverer’ (of which the archaeologist is a sub-type) to tell narratives of Third World/ colonial penetration. Central to these are the drawing or deciphering of maps (Shohat and Stam 1994:145–148). Although *The English Patient* shares with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) the metaphors and instruments of archaeology and maps, the former creates around them a space for questioning the colonial narrative it evokes.

The treatment of Egypt and its archaeology is symptomatic of wider imperial, Eurocentric attitudes to the whole of the eastern Mediterranean/Near East region. A significant slice of the twentieth-century narratives set in this part of the world

was penned by Agatha Christie (Guglielmi 2001:351–389). The filmed versions of her Oriental detective stories with archaeological content are *Death on the Nile* (1978) and, set in Petra, *Appointment with Death* (1984). In terms of historical archaeological practice they are accurate (not least because Christie worked on a number of archaeological sites and was married to archaeologist Max Mallowan) but they are not the neutral narratives they portray themselves to be. They uncritically demonstrate the European attitude to the Orient as an inheritance due to Europe because of the natural progress of civilization away from the East and to the West. Mesopotamia is a created, western archaeological narrative wherein the central theme is progressing civilization, '[a] way of constructing history in its own image and claiming precedence for a Western culture' (Bahrani 1998:171). Christie, like her husband Mallowan, and the archaeology that they practised, was complicit in this Eurocentrism (Chaldis 2001; Guglielmi 2001; Schiffer 2001).

In *A Month in the Country* (1988 and see later in this article), the grave-digging archaeologist – Moon – has no sooner found his grave (in Yorkshire, England) than he is off to Basra and further excavation work there. It is worth noting that popular fiction rarely, if ever, allows non-Europeans the freedom and stimulation of self-directed archaeology. Europeans can engage in archaeology anywhere for any reason, others cannot and must endure colonial and class impositions. For a contemporary twist see *Blade Trinity* (2004) in which Iraq is archaeologically identified (by a computer-generated Aztec-like temple situated in the Syrian Desert) as both the cradle of civilization and the birthplace of evil, here taking the form of the *Ur-vampire*, Dracula (very much a metaphor for a biological weapon of mass-destruction).

Treasured objects

The quest for treasure as an archaeological motivation is common in films, and is a central strand of cultural appropriations. It is a cultural concept with deep routes springing from European mythology and story telling as evidenced in tales such as *Beowulf*, the *Volsung Saga* and the *Mabinogion* (Pearce and Bounia 2000:48–59). Filmically it is a theme most familiar from the Indiana Jones trilogy: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). All fuse notions of the mythic object (the Ark of the Covenant, the Shiva Stones and the Holy Grail, respectively) as both existing and having real supernatural power. The stories are placed within a recognizably real, pre-Second World War archaeological framework. Dr Jones teaches archaeology at an American university and also collects objects for the university museum. In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* we are explicitly told that archaeology is not the search for treasure, nor for philosophical truth, but for fact. All three films, however, allow their hero to indulge in what is effectively the looting of indigenous cultural heritage, portrayed as the legitimate collecting of antiquities. All three films reflect western cultural imperialism (Shohat and Stam, 1994:125–126, 145–147) but also make the occasional nod to indigenous rights. In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Dr Jones returns one of the Shiva Stones to the village from which it was

stolen, on the basis that if he did not do so it would only sit in a museum gathering dust with other rocks. Allowing that this is a veiled admission that the items should not go to a foreign museum, nevertheless this support for culture in the community is, in effect, misleadingly set against the alternative of museum storage. This does accurately reflect a perception in the popular consciousness that objects in storage are being deliberately concealed from view, and also raises the question of museums as dead places, where treasures are merely hoarded.

Indiana Jones's position is only marginally better than the approach of his opposition, usually archaeologists working for the Third Reich. Their desire in collecting such objects is to boost their own power. Such archaeological work was carried out under the Third Reich and a detailed examination of it has been written by Henning Haßmann (2000:65–139). There were two key, mutually antagonistic, organizations: the Amt Rosenberg, founded in 1934, and the only slightly less sinister SS-Ahnenerbe, founded in 1935 (Haßmann 2000:76–86; Nicholas 1994: 72–75, 197–200 gives a summary). By the close of the 1930s the SS-Ahnenerbe largely controlled serious – and often still respected – archaeological research. But during the war years this was carried out in tandem with the looting of museum collections, the falsification and destruction of archaeological evidence and the collecting of Jewish skulls from concentration camps; all to support and demonstrate Germanic racial superiority from the days of prehistory (Haßmann 2000:96–108, 125–130).

If the Indiana Jones movies are one of the clearest demonstrations of these issues they are also the most recent in a long line of films concerned with archaeology as a treasure hunt. Earlier examples include *Secret of the Incas* (1954; see Hall 2000) and many of the Egypt-based films discussed earlier, along with a host of films that deal with shipwrecks as sources of salvageable treasure including *The Golden Mistress* (1954), *Sharks* (1969), *Shark Treasure* (1974) and *Titanic* (1999). More recent additions to the cycle include *Lara Croft Tomb Raider* (2001), its sequel, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: the Cradle of Life* (2003), and *Welcome to the Jungle* (2003). In the Lara Croft films archaeology is graphically equated with looting and site destruction (notably the temples of Angkor Wat, Cambodia) and a very ready client relationship with auction houses. Given that these films have a contemporary rather than an historical setting they cannot be understood in the way that the Indiana Jones trilogy can. There is a barely discernible difference in the way both Lara Croft and her opposition loot archaeological sites. In part this is because it reflects its computer-game origin and the pared-down dynamics of Eurocentric treasure hunting which the film-makers perceived were required to make the film work effectively, and in part because archaeology has largely failed to communicate the complexities and distinctions of archaeological method at a popular level.

In *Welcome to the Jungle* the treasure is a golden idol retrieved from a hidden, booby-trapped cave in a remote South American jungle. Possession of the idol is contested by the indigenous people, not because of its historical worth but because it is worth millions of dollars and when sold (to a western collector) will give the community the economic independence they need from American capitalist

exploitation of the area's gold mines. It is a reworking of the *Secret of the Incas*, which deploys archaeology not for its own sake but to support the fight against the social and economic exploitation of indigenous peoples. It turns superstitious prophecy about the loss of the idol into a canny financial exploitation of it, but the drawback is that the cultural heritage of an indigenous people is sold off, unrecognized. The narrative drive of this story and its resolution is to persuade us that this is the right solution but it is really the dressing up of an established stereotype in some new clothes.

The Golden Salamander (1951, from Victor Canning's 1949 novel) centres on archaeologist David Redfearn. In the film he is a museum curator from (implicitly) the British Museum, sent to north Africa to retrieve a collection of Etruscan antiquities acquired by the museum after their recovery from a shipwreck. Redfearn has to check the inventory and then catalogue and repack the collection; simultaneously he becomes embroiled in an arms-dealing drama. The leader of the arms dealers owns the villa where the antiquities are temporarily stored and is a collector, one who cannot abide museums and glass cases full of objects he cannot possess. He sets fire to the antiquities and Redfearn shoots him and manages to save most of the objects from the flames. Redfearn and his near-nemesis are two sides of the same coin and conjure a number of oppositions: professional versus amateur, colonial versus indigenous, knowledge versus capitalism (the collector's passion is linked to greed and financial gain). Essentially it is an imperial narrative in which the West, through the British Museum, is shown as the natural inheritor of Mediterranean civilization – by extension something North Africans can only ignore or appreciate for its financial value alone.

Perhaps the most explicit rejection of treasure hunting is the Egyptian film, *Al Mummia* (1969; also known as *The Night of Counting the Years*). Set around Thebes at the end of the nineteenth century it tells of a Horrabat tribesman who rejects his tribe's practice of looting Egyptian tombs for the antiquities market. He alerts the authorities in Cairo so that the tombs can be excavated rather than looted. It thus recognizes the legitimate role of archaeologists accountable to the state and to the public (Schnapp 1996:12) and distinguishes between archaeology and the seeking for treasure. It also asks why so many archaeologists in Egypt are Europeans/Americans and what the relationship of Islam is to Egypt's pre-Islamic past, both Pharaonic and Coptic (an issue discussed in Hassan 1998). Of all the Egypt-based films *Al Mummia* is the only one to offer a public archaeology dimension, in recognizing that the protection and understanding of a nation's cultural heritage requires the consent and involvement of that nation's people. That said, as Shohat and Stam (1994:153–156) point out in their discussion of the film, the final beneficiaries of the archaeological intervention are not Egyptians but their French colonial masters. The loss, whether to the black market or to a European museum, is still painful: '[t]he film ends, then, with the emptiness left in the wake of the European intrusion' (Shohat and Stam 1994:152).

Al Mummia is the most accomplished of a small group of films that question the archaeological appropriation (through archaeology) of Third World material culture into western museums (Shohat and Stam 1994:153). It can be found though

in more mainstream fare. In the film *Rush Hour* (1998), the Hong Kong Police retrieve stolen Chinese antiquities on the eve of the British return of Hong Kong to China. These later go on display in Los Angeles at a cultural and trade fair. The Hong Kong setting permits an astute, anti-colonial sub-text, with the original loss of independence equated with the loss of antiquities and their recovery symbolizing the restoration of independence from British rule. The master criminal at the centre of the film is a senior figure in the British administration of Hong Kong, who has long since turned to crime to maintain his collection of Chinese antiquities. Supervillains and their henchmen similarly engage in black market antiquities dealing in *Never Say Never Again* (1983) and *True Lies* (1994). The collecting of archaeology indulged in by the privileged aristocrats of knowledge and money in these works is in direct descent from Renaissance collectors and their cabinets of curiosity.

European politics

European cinema has generally been less concerned with Hollywood-style genres. French and Italian films in particular have interesting reflections on archaeology. In *L'Amour et Mort* (1984) one of the main characters is an archaeologist whose life's work has been the excavation of a Gallo-Belgic villa site (almost single-handed it has to be said, a common myth of archaeological fictions, see Thomas 1976:314). As his sense of approaching death intensifies he feels that the only thing he will be remembered for is a paper on Gallo-Belgic rubbish dumps. There is a refreshing ambivalence here that questions the value of archaeology as obsession while recognizing the dedication of a life's work.

Italy has given us *Fellini's Roma* (1972) and *Viaggio in Italia* (1953). The former is director Federico Fellini's personal look at the history of Rome and includes a section showing a subway under construction. We see workmen crash through the remains of a buried Roman house. There is a brief glimpse of beautiful wall frescoes before the fresh air let in by the workmen destroys them. We also hear the workmen grumble about the continual delays caused to the engineering project by the need for archaeologists to record each new bit of archaeology. It is a vivid record of the days of rescue archaeology and of the constant struggle between archaeology and development pressure. *Viaggio in Italia* tells of the personal inner journeys of a married couple against the backdrop of the ruins of Pompeii and the museums of Naples. It clearly attests the importance of historical and continuing regional identity, something that is brought out by the recurring emphasis on the archaeology to be seen in Pompeii and Naples. This same archaeology is shown to be personally rewarding for the couple as they contemplate their future together (Mulvey 2000). *Viaggio in Italia* is also part of a long line of films dealing with human dramas set against the backdrop of archaeological discovery (for others see Membury 2002:8–18) but in its lack of histrionics and in its more refined aesthetic it does – rather like *L'Amour a Mort* – show that archaeology can be a well-researched supporting player in film.

French cinema has also given us the 1985 film *Une Femme ou Deux*. The principal character is a palaeontologist/archaeologist who discovers the fossil remains of a

Homo habilis skeleton. He labels the remains '41B Laura', and interprets her as the first European woman. Advice on the making of the film came from Yves Coppens and the French Institute of Palaeontology, which presumably accounts for the realistic-seeming depiction of French archaeology. We see a dedicated (not to say obsessive) archaeologist at work, struggling with fund-raising and politics. We see glimpses of the museum context in which he operates and we see disputes with colleagues and employers (notably when he unveils his reconstruction of 'Laura' as a black woman, raising the ire of his colleagues who condemn him as a leftist). The film does not naïvely set out to paint archaeology as a positive social force but does recognize its importance, its potential to be positive and that it is contested. In *Une Femme ou Deux* there is no sign of the public, even in the museum where the archaeologist is based. There is, though, a vocal public; the local community in the area where the fossils were found perceives archaeology very negatively and protests against further archaeological work because an influx of visitors is unwanted. This may be a particularly Gallic nuance – certainly in the United Kingdom archaeological discoveries in rural hinterlands are often seen as matters of great local pride and as economic stimuli for the tourism-led economy.

More positive protest however crops up in the James Bond adventure, *The World is Not Enough* (2000), which includes a scene set in Azerbaijan dealing with a strong protest against the route of an oil-pipeline going through a rock-cut medieval chapel. The protest is successful and the pipeline diverted. In the Russian film, *прощание* [*Proscanie*] (1983) a small island community has to be relocated because the construction of a dam will flood their island. The Academy of Sciences and Arts sends its archaeologists to collect two of the peasant houses as a record. The community, however, does not want to move and the film – the title translates as *Farewell* – asks if the saving of a couple of houses is really any recompense for the loss of a community, the destruction of a way of life. It is a point tellingly made because the film so skilfully imbues every inch of the island with cultural significance.

A Month in The Country (1988, adapted from J.L. Carr's 1980 novel) is set in a Yorkshire village two years after the First World War and concerns the attempts of two survivors of that war to rebuild their fractured lives. One is engaged in the restoration of a Last Judgement wall-painting in a church of Anglo-Saxon origin. The other is carrying out small-scale excavations close beside the church in search of a lost grave. It is through the archaeological work that they carry out that they begin to mend their lives and develop a sense of landscape and a sense of history.

Gender and practice

A Month in the Country also raises questions of gender and sexual orientation in relation to archaeology through making the excavator homosexual, which leads him into military misconduct and then archaeology as an escape. Queer archaeology gets little airing then beyond a metaphor for anti-social strangeness or safely remote historical attitude. Women fare a little better, but not hugely. In *Une Femme ou Deux* the strength of the female characters that surround the

archaeologist serve to point up the absence of female archaeologists in the world portrayed – an absence made more pointed by the film's key archaeological discovery being the fossilized remains of a female hominid. The archaeologist describes her as the first French woman, which is acceptable to all concerned. What is not acceptable to the establishment is that she is interpreted as a black woman. The overall impression given by the films studied is of a male-dominated archaeological profession.

However, the trajectory of social change with respect to women in society does seem to have a corresponding arc within film; into the 1980s there were virtually no portrayals of women as archaeologists and the few that were can safely be characterized as inadequate and typified by Joan Crawford's mad scientist in *Trog* (1970). There was though an interesting strand of female characters of a strong disposition able to take on and win against male characters in a competitive environment: we might call them aspirational archaeologists. The key examples would be Anne Miller, who plays a singing and dancing archaeological PhD student whose main dance number redefines (i.e. leaves in turmoil, a 'Revisionist' metaphor) the Museum of Anthropological History in *On the Town* (1949). In *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), Katherine Hepburn plays a somewhat disorganized socialite who, within the conventions of screwball comedy, redefines her palaeontologist partner and his museum of dinosaurs; she normalizes him away from being a cloistered curator, concluding in her destruction of the dinosaur skeleton he has been reconstructing – his body of knowledge – which he cheerfully accepts. Thirdly we have the female support leads of Karen Allen and Kate Capshaw in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, both of whom are correctives to the male archaeological obsession. These have given way to portrayals of women as archaeologists; though to date I have only encountered nine leading character female notional-archaeologists (i.e. broadly encompassing archaeologist, anthropologist, palaeontologist, historian and museum curator as the same basic character brand, usually a sub-type of the 'scientist') in popular film.

Whether on the side of good – as in *The Relic* (1997), *The Mummy* (1999) and its sequel, *Tomb Raider* (2001) and its sequel, *The Body* (2000), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Jurassic Park III* (2001), *Lake Placid* (1999) and *Highlander III The Sorcerer* (1999) – or bad – as in *Trog* (1970) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) – in the dramas being enacted these female 'archaeologists' are all portrayed as determined, independent and intelligent (stock heroic requirements it has to be admitted). They variously combine realistic elements of archaeological work – coping with fieldwork, with the demands of financial sponsorship and academic integrity, and with the politics of identity – with wider narrative concerns. In part their strong portrayals recognize the real-world social recognition of equality for women. But several of the films go beyond this and suggest that women professionals are human too and subject to the foibles of greed, professional rivalry and psychotic, mad-scientist obsession (as in *Trog*), and may also use female archaeologists as examples of specialists in cutting edge, interdisciplinary study. In *Highlander III* the female archaeologist works for the New York Museum of Ancient History. She carries out her fieldwork in Japan specializing in the boundary between

archaeology and folklore (though this is rather simplistically portrayed as archaeology proving the literal truth of folklore) which can be read as a plea for finding drama and human stories in the past.

The Relic tells of a wayward anthropologist who is transformed into a brain-sucking genetic mutation, the Kathoga. During fieldwork in the Amazon, he takes one of the ritual drugs of the ethnic grouping he is studying but without having the antidote handy. By the time he gets back to the office – the Field Museum, Chicago – he has become a horrific, murderous beast who needs the hyperthalamus in the human brain to survive. He establishes a lair in the sewers beneath the museum and begins to work his way through the brains of the staff (all former colleagues) and also the guests who arrive for the exclusive opening of the museum's new blockbuster exhibition on world myths and superstitions. The film's several sub-texts hinge on its monster metaphor. Thus we have a clear explication of the destructive professional rivalries and gender politics at play in the museum but we are also reminded of the inherited Eurocentrism of American culture through its own colonial activities. Amerindian culture is somewhat tritely exploited for its shock-horror potential and, although the Amerindians are tacitly recognized as in control of their own environment, still the Kathoga metaphorically stands for that culture, collected into a western museum and ultimately destroyed. The Field Museum's display of world myths and superstitions is implicitly a lesson in western cultural superiority through rational, scientific, collecting endeavour; the superstitions all appear to come from Third World cultures.

Trog (1970) is a film in which a power-mad anthropologist/archaeologist discovers an ape-man or troglodyte, living in a cave in Wiltshire, England, and bends it to do her will.

All these films demonstrate a wider narrative convention, concerned with broadly-defined scientists meddling with what they do not understand or are not meant to know (Hall 2000:97–98; Thomas 1976). Such films reinforce the popular notion that archaeologists form an élite, with access to privileged knowledge used for their own ends. The archaeologist-priest of *The Exorcist* (1973) comes into this category and a more recent and eccentric example of a Catholic priest-archaeologist can be found in *The Body* (2000). Working in Jerusalem and confronted with the prospect of a recently discovered body being that of Christ (thus proving there was no Resurrection), he commits suicide. Faith and science (here again represented by archaeology) are clearly not reconcilable and their relationship is one of conflict and violence, thereby touching on a widespread belief or cultural norm that science is the embodiment of rational enquiry and that it arose out of a struggle with superstition. This has been challenged recently by philosopher John Gray (2002:21–23), who observed that science actually originated in faith, magic and trickery and is in part built upon prejudice, conceit, passion, opposition to reason and social acceptance. Science is sometimes regarded as a supremely rational activity, yet its history shows scientists flouting the rules of scientific method. Not only the origins but also the progress of science come from acting against reason. In this light the metaphorical quality of the films under discussion in questioning the official narrative of archaeology can only be welcomed as a point of debate.

Timeline (2003) is adapted from the novel by Michael Crichton, for whom the dangers of science-out-of-control in the service of capitalist imperatives is a constant thread. Filmically it can be seen in *Westworld* (1973), the *Jurassic Park* franchise and now in *Timeline*. This fuses time-travel back to the fourteenth century AD with the exploration of the same piece of the past by a group of archaeologists, financed by a secretive capitalist corporation. Although it portrays archaeology as very much the handmaiden of history it nevertheless recognizes that the driving motivation for many archaeologists is to understand people – who they were, what they did and how both influence who we are and what we do. However the film also allies this with a comfortable conservatism that sees constancy, caring and honour as the distinguishing features of the past as against machines, gadgets and the sameness of the present and the future. The film does retain a degree of ambiguity and never quite decides (should it?) whether the common man's contribution to history is as important as that of the noble élites. It does argue that archaeology is for all and that it is a social good but at the same time and in the interests of dramatic narrative adds some of its own myths about how archaeology is practised.

DISCUSSION: MAKING A CRISIS OUT OF A DRAMA?

It is easy to have an entirely pessimistic view about archaeology in film, but recognizing the nature of cinema and its predilection for narrative (which is historically dominated by a concern with myth rather than reality) allows for more optimism. The cinematic image of archaeology fluctuates between the poles of the positive pursuit of hidden knowledge (thus dispelling ignorance) and the negative rape of the sacred and indigenous. This is healthy and reinforces the reality of cinema as something made by diverse makers and audiences and reflecting wider political debates, not just what we might call the mechanics of the discipline. Archaeology is not an exclusive entry into the truth (or a version of it); another way in is fiction which often seeks to make meaning, through narrative and metaphor. At a basic level fictional archaeological narratives do recognize the whole process of archaeology, from fieldwork to museum curation, though admittedly this is often on a speeded-up narrative-driven time-scale. As a depicted profession archaeology is no worse off than other professions: scientists, psychiatrists, doctors, teachers, architects and the police are equally misrepresented.

A recent analysis of archaeologists in popular culture (Russell 2002b:53) suggested that 98 per cent of the British population had no regular contact with a real archaeologist, seen as a factor contributing to the haziness of the boundary between fiction and reality. The solutions offered were to use cinema's 'stereotypes' against themselves; to completely reject the fictional images, or simply to continue to ignore popular culture. There is another alternative. It is true that cinema's stock characterizations and plots (the 'stereotypes') are exaggerations, but exaggerations of a reality, the underlying issues of which (and their historical antecedents) these films capture quite well. The so-called 'stereotyping' is also due to a somewhat playful, myth-making, narrative tradition which has a streak of anti-establishment

ethos. Such narratives satisfy for many a sense of exclusion from archaeology and museums, giving an alternative, accessible entry into hidden knowledge through the consumption of narrative. This exclusion manifests itself in the portrayal of archaeologists/curators as holders of privileged knowledge (in *Doc Savage Man of Bronze* (1975), set in the 1930s, the archaeologist is a genius of both archaeology and geology, his '-ologies' emphasizing his high intelligence and élite status). Into the mix are thrown notions of supernatural power, colonial nostalgia, greed and treasure, in a male-dominated world.

There are of course drawbacks to a popular perception of archaeology refracted by narrative conventions including a widespread dim awareness of how the past can be legitimately acquired and protected. Archaeology deems unethical the flouting of indigenous rights and the trade in illicitly acquired antiquities but the thriving black market in antiquities and the complacency of auction houses in their circulation are elided in the popular, public consciousness and seem to be seen as equivalents to archaeology. Archaeology is also much more multivocal and multicultural in the wake of post-processual and social archaeology. Narratives of popular culture have not really adapted to this, though there are glimmerings. *A.I.* (2001) includes a deep-future postscript in which alien or highly evolved human-robot creatures can recreate the past through memory recovery. This is an eloquent metaphor for the agenda of social archaeology in wanting to recover past human complexity – recognizing that people in the past constructed their own identities through bounded interactions with each other, with élite power structures, and with their environment in its physical and temporal manifestations.

It follows that the making of personal and social/community identities is a constant on-going process. In our own contemporary world this also includes looking back at the past, to challenge its guardianship and explore fictionalized variables. In the same way that archaeology is in fact full of cultural biographies – of objects, of sites, and of landscapes – that constantly have their meanings changed through time and space so the process of our understanding of these changes – archaeology – has a cultural biography of which popular film and its narratives are but one reflex. I am not arguing that those who see these films simply accept them and perceive archaeology accordingly (just as people can choose a fringe archaeological text over a specialized report without automatically accepting the fringe discourse, see Mathews 2002:158–159), though there are those who undoubtedly do. Rather, I have tried to elucidate what sort of messages – deliberate or unintentional – are being put out by popular cinema and so are available to believe in or not, consciously or subconsciously by individuals. Cinema in particular has yet to catch up with displaying a real public face to archaeology (though historically some of these films can be seen as critiquing a lack of public archaeology). The more that the public is included in archaeology the greater the chances are of this changing.

The other major drawback is cinema's sense of authenticity. Most of the films in question are not concerned with giving precise lessons in historical, archaeological or scientific fact. It is certainly true though that many of them claim to achieve a look that is authentic but this is a narrow meaning of authenticity, one essentially

to do with persuaded believability. It is the creation of a believable context in which the examination of human behaviour, fears and anxieties, of possibilities and pleas for knowledge can take place (and again there is an element of deliberate and delighted-in provocation, a common trait within popular culture). Viewed from the position of circles of consumption and production such films can work as metaphorical dialogues on cultural exclusion, Eurocentric and professional superiority, political and bodily identity and an abiding desire for stimulating stories – a key pressure valve of popular culture, if you like, a self-administered sugar-coated pill.

If the films often seem repetitive this is due to the persistence of some archaeological practices, the stubbornness of inherited perceptions held by audiences and the narrative conventions of cinema (its semiotic language relies on such conventions to help tell a story in a concise, understandable and inclusive way). If we read such films in an overly literal way we will miss their (sometimes unintended) point. If we allow them to stand as colourful, narrative-driven popular metaphors questioning received wisdom then they form a valid, more coherent debating position in a social dialogue. With archaeology, as with other bodies of knowledge, if people are not engaged by or clear about what the discipline is saying (and sometimes in spite of this) then they will tell their own stories of exploitation, adventure and criticism. These stories may be fantastic and unbelievable but they also inspire wonder at human drama in the past and ask archaeology and archaeologists to do the same.

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NOTE

1. Copyright note concerning Figures 1 and 2. The author of this article made extensive searches in both the UK and the US to find the current copyright owner of the 1959 Hammer version of *The Mummy* but was unable to identify anyone holding the UK/European licensing rights.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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ABSTRACTS

Romancing the stones : L'archéologie dans le cinéma populaire

Mark A. Hall

Cet article traite de la représentation de l'archéologie et des archéologues dans le cinéma populaire. De nombreux films clés sont analysés afin d'aborder les sujets principaux de l'article : l'appropriation culturelle et des éléments contestés comme les trésors, le public, la politique et le sexe. La représentation de l'archéologie dans un film ne peut être séparée des contextes culturels généraux dans lesquels elle évolue et, bien que les évocations de l'archéologie et des archéologues ne soient souvent pas satisfaisantes, l'auteur cherche à arriver à une conclusion favorable en essayant de comprendre le dynamisme narratif de la fiction populaire et la longue histoire d'exclusion du public des domaines de l'archéologie. La plupart des films considérés n'aspirent pas à être classés comme chefs d'œuvres, mais font part d'une forme culturelle parfois perspicace et capable d'inciter le débat dans le cadre essentiel de pratiques culturelles qui construisent et développent l'identité individuelle et sociale.

Mots clés: cinéma, eurocentrisme, étude de films, culture populaire, trésor

Romancing the stones - Archäologie im Spiegel des Kinofilms

Mark A. Hall

Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Darstellung von Archäologie und Archäologen im Kinofilm. Eine Reihe von Schlüsselfilmen werden diskutiert, die die Hauptthemen des Artikels, nämlich kulturelle Aneignung und umstrittenen Bereiche (einschließlich Schatz, der Öffentlichkeit, Politik und Geschlechterfragen), ansprechen. Die Darstellung der Archäologie im Film lässt sich nicht von den weiteren kulturellen Kontexten trennen, in denen sie wirken, und es kann – wenngleich auch die Abbildung von Archäologie und Archäologen häufig unbefriedigend ist – ein positiver Schluss gezogen werden, anhand dessen versucht wird, den erzählerischen Antrieb der öffentlichen Fiktion und die lange Geschichte des Ausschlusses der Öffentlichkeit von der Archäologie zu verstehen. Die meisten der einbezogenen Filme können zwar nicht als große Kunstwerke gelten, aber sie sind Teil einer Kulturform, die Ansichten anbietet, die eine Debatte innerhalb eines vitalen Kontextes kultureller Praktiken ermöglichen, durch die Identität – sei es die des Individuums oder der Gruppe – geschaffen wird und sich entwickelt.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Kino, Eurozentrismus, Filmstudien, Populärkultur, Schatz