

Is Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Able to Foster Peace in a Turmoiled World?

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INTRODUCTION: THE CURRENT WORLD SEEKS NEMESIS

We are witnesses to a multidimensional crisis throughout the world. The lack of leadership, bigotry, imperialism, the imposition of force through slavery and exploitation, the foolish and ahistorical (indeed psychopathic) insistence of uncultured brutes who call themselves humans to change the tradition of peoples with a thousand-year history, the lack of respect for ancient peoples for geopolitical reasons, the insist for hegemony by some neglecting the physical law that in every action there is a reaction; all call for a “divine” justice (nemesis) and punishment. We live in a turmoiled world (Brzezinski, 2010; Rosefelde & Mills, 2015).

We have witnessed the recent extermination of ancient peoples under the guise of their religious transformation (Vogt, 2022). The economic imposition of the renewed political doctrine of leaders who, with the power of electronic weapons and the so-called “democratic imposition”, appear to compensate for their animal instincts at the cost of human lives (Pew Research Center, 2020). Under the pretext of a threat, one great force against another invents alliances against the other evil, with the aim of the well-being of a group¹.

The enlightened civilized leader is wanted! The bright personalities in the history of the civilized world who established, and at the cost of their lives, at times, global organizations, global principles of ethics for a peaceful world, are missed or threatened to their voice.

This violent, impudent and arrogant attitude/behavior, which constituted for the ancient Greek world a violation of the moral order and an attempt to overthrow the social balance and the order of the world in general, was believed that (repeatedly, and even after warnings from the gods themselves) ultimately lead to the downfall and destruction of the “insolent one”. By expressing the perception of insolence and its consequences, as it is presented at least in its most ancient form, with the pattern ὕβρις (hubris, insult) → ἄτη (Ati, the blindness of the mind) → νημεσις (nemesis, the divine justice) → τισις (tisis, punishment) (Aeschylus *Persians*, 821-822²), we can say that the ancients believed that an “insolence” (Aeschylus, *Seven on Thebes*, 423-446³) usually caused the intervention of the gods, and mainly of Zeus, who sent the “ἄτη” (Homer *Iliad*, T 91-94⁴) to the insolent one, that is the clouding, the blindness of the mind. This, in turn, led the insulter to new insults, until he committed a very great folly, to fall into a very serious error, which caused the “nemesis”⁵ (Sophocles, *Ajax*, 776-777⁶), that is, the wrath

¹ https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joe_2035_july16.pdf

² It originally meant fair distribution, the sharing done by legitimate authority. Over time, it came to mean the taking of judicial action by authority to administer justice. This wrath of the gods, as well as their desire to avenge the insults of mortals, is called Nemesis. In the Hesiod's *Theogony*, it is mentioned that she was one of the first deities to appear, who was born single-parentally from Night. Nemesis was responsible for the fair administration of justice to humans, which in the case of those who committed insult (hubris), was their punishment.

³ <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0012%3Acard%3D800>

⁴ <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0014%3Acard%3D422>

⁵ <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0133%3Abook%3D19%3Acard%3D74>

⁶ <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0184%3Acard%3D748>

and revenge of the gods, which brought about the “tisin” (Homer *Odyssey*, ω 351-352⁷), i.e. his punishment and crushing/destruction. From the classical era onwards, in many cases the concepts of Ati, Diki and Nemesis seem to acquire in the consciousness of people an equivalent meaning, that of divine punishment.

The ancient Greeks, on whose culture the Western mentality was founded, felt awe in the face of hubris, the thirst for the infinite that is inherent in everyone and believed that it brought about the nemesis of the gods. A deeper study of the history of the ancient Greeks suggests to us that the analysis of the limits of development cannot only concern its technical aspects, but must also focus on its psychological component, especially when the feeling of guilt that we are violating an ancient divine law prevails (Lesky, 1966; Stearns, 1981).

Along these reflections in the current degenerated world, we in academia and through our main weapon the “pen”, and multimedia diffusion, owe to our predecessors and our children coming generations a different voice. Our belief in co-existence under the umbrella of virtues, brotherhood and liberty in a peaceful world with honest ways of competition for development, education, innovation and sustainability (O’Brien, 2009).

At any rate, under the polemic conflicts is there hope for archaeology and cultural heritage to contribute to peace (Figure 1)?

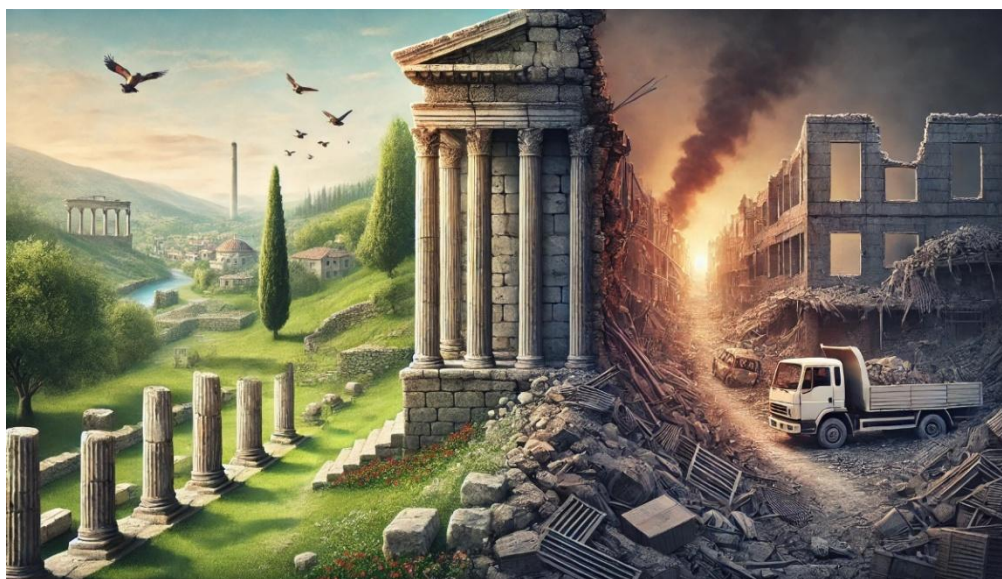


Figure 1. A striking image depicting the contrast between ancient archaeological ruins and modern destruction. On one side, there are well-preserved ancient ruins (adapted from ChatGPT generative AI tool)

The current phase of humanity has lost the meaning of the essence of life, of peaceful development and progress. The world is not only our earth. But infinite. In the foggy, gloomy atmosphere in which we live, each of us, from a position of responsibility, tries to be heard even by a few, promoting peace, love and solidarity. In our Journal, we promote the scientific tools that highlight history, art, tradition and culture; we keep our roots alive in our memory.

In these brief reflections, we will briefly mention the contribution of archaeology to the achievement of peace.

The idea that archaeology promotes peace stems from the way it fosters understanding, appreciation, and shared heritage between different cultures and communities. While this might not always be immediately obvious, archaeology can contribute to peacebuilding in several key ways:

Shared Cultural Heritage

Archaeology & Cultural Heritage uncovers the common threads that link humanity across time and space. By revealing the interconnectedness of past civilizations, it shows how people from different backgrounds have influenced one another over centuries. This can help to dissolve boundaries that separate communities today, encouraging mutual respect and reducing conflict.

For example, archaeological discoveries in the Middle East have shown how ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia and Egypt engaged in trade and cultural exchange, underscoring the long-standing ties between different regions. Understanding these shared roots can foster a sense of unity rather than division.

⁷ <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D24%3Acard%3D327>

Dialogue and Diplomacy

In conflict zones, archaeology can serve as a neutral ground for dialogue and cooperation. Collaborative archaeological projects between nations or ethnic groups can build relationships that transcend political or ideological divisions. In places where identity and heritage are contested, archaeology can help facilitate dialogue by focusing on the scientific and cultural aspects of the past rather than present-day conflicts (Bennett, 2020). Here one may reflect on the possibility of (mis-)using cultural dialogue as a spearhead to economic supremacy and hegemony, which on the other hand does not appear, at least, to inhere a bloody destructive death toll result.

Education and Empathy

Archaeology educates people about the diversity and richness of human cultures, which can foster empathy and tolerance. By understanding the experiences and achievements of different societies, individuals may become more open to respecting cultural differences. Archaeology shows that civilizations rise, fall, and interact with one another, which highlights the importance of cooperation and the futility of conflict in the long run (Figure 2).



Figure 2. A symbolic image depicting the role of archaeology in fostering peace. The scene shows an archaeological excavation site where people from diverse background building mutual understanding, preserving shared heritage, and creating dialogue (adapted from ChatGPT generative AI tool)

For example, UNESCO's World Heritage program promotes the preservation of archaeological sites as part of a global effort to safeguard cultural diversity. This not only protects valuable sites but also spreads awareness of shared human heritage, which can combat xenophobia and nationalist extremism.

Healing after Conflict

In post-conflict settings, archaeology can play a role in reconciliation by helping to reclaim and restore lost or damaged heritage. This process can help communities rebuild their sense of identity and pride in their shared history, fostering healing after periods of violence or division. Reclaiming destroyed heritage can help rebuild a sense of continuity and belonging, which is essential for peace.

Counteracting Cultural Destruction

During wars and conflicts, cultural heritage is often targeted for destruction, either as collateral damage or as a deliberate act of erasing an identity. Archaeology stands against this destruction by preserving and documenting heritage, often risking political and physical danger. Protecting and conserving these sites provides a counter-narrative to the ideologies of division and violence, demonstrating that humanity treasures its shared past.

Groups like the International Committee of the Blue Shield work in conflict zones to protect cultural heritage, and their work is an important form of peacebuilding, aiming to preserve not only the physical evidence of the past but also the cultural identity and continuity of affected populations.

CONCLUSION

While archaeology employing all modern cultural technological tools alone cannot solve conflicts or bring about peace, it plays an important role in fostering understanding, preserving shared heritage, and facilitating dialogue between communities. By highlighting the common humanity of different groups, archaeology promotes a more inclusive and peaceful worldview. Studying in a collaborative & interdisciplinary manner our ancestry past, which becomes a most valuable palimpsest, provides realistic solutions that are a source of inspiration, understanding, peace, because we must learn from our past to continue a progressive safe pace to the future.

NOTE

Based on my presentation to the Peace Offensive Meeting manifesto between the World Academy of Arts and Sciences (WAAS) with the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA), in Maribor, Slovenia and took place in the auspices of the Alma Mater Europaea University (AMEU). The present text is an extended version. I am thankful to Prof. Klaus Mainzer president of EASA for inviting me and the president of AMEU Prof. Ludvik Toplak for his invitation and hospitality at Maribor, Slovenia for this meeting (<https://euro-acad.eu/events?id=250>).

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

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