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FORUM

Interview with Alexander Bauer, outgoing editor of the Journal

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Sophie Vigneron, incoming editor of the International Journal of Cultural Property, interviewed Alexander Bauer, who was the journal's editor from 2003 to 2023. Alexander is Professor of Anthropology at Queens College and The Graduate Center, City University of New York, and Associate Director of the Sinop Region Archaeological Project, an interdisciplinary archaeological and heritage project on the landscapes and seascapes of the Black Sea coastal community of Sinop (Turkey).

Sophie Vigneron (SV): The journal's readership is familiar with your name but who is the person behind the name and how did you get into your field?

Alexander Bauer (AB): I grew up in New York City and spent a lot of my childhood going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; my mother was a Latin teacher, and I'm half Greek. So, as a result, I had almost no choice but to have an interest in the ancient world. What was surprising is that I didn't think about archaeology as a career earlier than I did. I was interested in art history and classics. I didn't even think of archaeology as something until I went to university. I went to Haverford College, outside of Philadelphia, which has cross registration with its neighboring school, Bryn Mawr College, which is very famous in the classical archaeology world. A lot of the AIA presidents have been Bryn Mawr undergraduates, graduates, or both.

I went to Haverford, thinking that I was going to do classics and Byzantine studies, but I discovered the archaeology department at Bryn Mawr and developed a passion for it and that's when it sort of merged all of my interests. I found that I'd had enough of ancient texts; I had been studying Latin for seven or eight years at that point and three or four years of ancient Greek, and I was a little tired of it, whereas I was being entranced by the material world of archaeology. I went to that program, I started moving further and further back into the past, and took a class on the Minoans and Mycenaeans, taught by Jim Wright who was a Bryn Mawr grad and later Director of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. He opened my eyes to archaeological theory, methods, and techniques, as well as fieldwork. He recommended that I do a PhD in anthropology rather than archaeology. I liked the social theory of anthropology and I wanted to find an anthropology program that fitted with what I wanted to do. But in the United States, it is difficult to find a program that has both old-world archaeology and anthropology: you can do archaeology with ancient classical studies or archaeology with anthropology, but the latter is more comparative and deals with Indigenous communities outside the Classical world. I ended up at Penn, which has a wonderful program, and famously dug at all these Mesopotamian sites and the Gordian project, which has materials

from the Classical world including Troy. So, it was wonderful being in that museum as well, and that's where I did my PhD.

SV: How did you start the editorship of the journal?

AB: It's a nice story. I was really interested in archaeological ethics when I was an undergraduate. It started because I wanted to get some field experience, and Bryn Mawr has a reputation because of Machteld Mellink in particular. A lot of the faculty have a very deep and strong sense of archaeological ethics against looting and the antiquities trade. In fact, my professor, Jim Wright, was instrumental in the case against Michael Ward blowing the whistle about some looted materials in his gallery. So, when I wanted to do some fieldwork in Israel, I knew that Larry Stager was digging the site of Ashkelon and it was supposed to be a very well-run, good excavation with good archaeological techniques. So, I was thinking about joining that or another project in Israel. However, I was told in no uncertain terms that since the Ashkelon dig was funded by Leon Levy and Shelby White, I could not join that dig because it was so-called tainted money, and that I would be blacklisted by the department. As a result, I didn't go on that dig and went to Ami Mazar's dig at Beth She'an instead. But that experience piqued my interest to find what was behind such a visceral reaction. So, during my senior year, I started a brown bag discussion series at Bryn Mawr where I invited students and the faculty to discuss contemporary issues in archaeology, archaeological ethics, and the antiquities trade.

Once I graduated and started my studies at Penn, I reached out to Patty Gerstenblith, who is a graduate of Bryn Mawr and was Editor of the IJCP at the time, and she told me to reach out to one of the other editorial board members, Stephen Urice, who has a PhD in art history and is a lawyer, and lived in Philadelphia where he worked at the Pew Charitable Trusts. She told me that he occasionally taught classes on cultural property law and might be a good person to talk to. I wrote to Stephen, we met to discuss cultural property law, and we quickly became great friends and have been ever since. We decided to collaborate and team teach a class on cultural property and, in that class, I really wanted to talk about intangible heritage, copyright, and safeguarding folklore, and examine who controls the narrative, not just the objects, but the narrative about the objects. We spent about a year together meeting weekly, hammering out different things about this course. We even started developing the draft of a textbook, which we've never finished writing, but it still exists in many chapters of manuscript form.

So, we taught at Penn, both in the Law School and in the Anthropology Department. It was during those discussions that I heard about the fact that the journal had gone out of publication and that it was on a hiatus. I was talking about it, with Stephen saying, you know, if the journal were to start again, it really should cover all these other issues and it should really do this and it should be expanded in these ways. And I did it with the sort of energy and enthusiasm of a young graduate student. Honestly, I think that Stephen saw me as an easy mark! I talked to Daniel Shapiro, who was at the time the President of the Society. I helped sketch out what the journal would look like: we had several meetings and talked with a representative of Cambridge Press. Shortly after that Daniel and Stephen approached me and asked me if I would edit it if they helped put it together. And I, of course, being an eager graduate student who thinks that they can do everything, said sure, that's awesome. Great, I'll do it!

SV: Your first editorial was entitled "(Re)Introducing the International Journal of Cultural Property." You had set out to expand the scope of the journal in two fundamental ways, by publishing pieces that focus on "how the past is used in the present to achieve political aims, and how policies dealing with cultural heritage out to acknowledge such political interests,"

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and by widening the range of voices and perspectives. These were ambitious and worthy goals; can you tell us how you have met them to make the journal what it is today?

AB: There were a lot of lawyers on the editorial board initially, but I had many conversations with Stephen, who was a very close collaborator and a colleague. One of the first decisions I made when developing the editorial board was to bring in people who were not lawyers or who were lawyers specializing in intellectual property and cultural rights issues. Two of the most instrumental people I reached out to were Michael Brown who was an anthropologist at Williams College, now Director of the School of Advanced Research in Santa Fe. He was an ethnographer who wrote *Who Owns Native Culture*? and was well regarded, and a property and cultural rights scholar named Madavi Sundar who is now at the Georgetown Law School, and was at the time at UC Davis School of Law. They have since stepped down but were close guides early on.

SV: You had a board with people from different disciplines to encourage interdisciplinarity.

AB: Yes. Absolutely. We wanted to have an editorial board that wasn't simply an advisory board or a name on a page, and I think the original vision was that we would have regular meetings of the entire board in person. And we did. It's just that the regularity of that was like every five or six years. Daniel [Shapiro] helped fundraise and he and I wrote a grant to do an initial symposium or a retreat at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund House at [the] Pocantico Center in New York. Almost the entire editorial board, approximately 25 of us, spent the weekend there. And we talked about the journal and what kinds of things we wanted to do, which was very helpful to create a sense of ownership and collegiality, introducing people to each other to break siloes between the different subject areas, and see them as intertwined. The IJCP had been very law-oriented as a journal and we didn't want to lose that law orientation, but we wanted to expand it out to include more voices, more key players, and interests in these discussions.

I wanted it to be law and policy and practice-oriented. I am a pragmatist. So, that also was a fit with me philosophically, to think about effects: what are the effects in the real world of this legal decision or this new statute? What are the effects to be gained or to be learned from this new way of presenting an archaeological site? Or what are the effects of pointing out this contradiction in practice? So, it wasn't just to examine how a heritage site is being manipulated by a nation to advance certain aims, but also to assess what we learn from that. What then should we do? I think academics especially, maybe lawyers less so, but certainly academics; anthropologists very much shy away from making a recommendation about what should be done because that's not an academic thing. I wanted people to think about different questions: Does it tell us about pitfalls? Is this a best practice? And so, in that opening editorial, I really wanted to say that all [of the] articles we publish should explicitly confront the issue of what we should take away from this. I don't think that's always something that academic journals do. So I saw the policy role of the IJCP as distinctive from other journals.

SV: Based on your experience as editor, what is your advice to authors who would like to submit to the Journal?

AB: I think a lot of the papers are law, policy, or practice-oriented, or try to do it, and I know that there have been times that I've read papers and I've said, OK, this is great, but go further, can you address this in particular? And there are probably a lot of times that I've prompted authors to add another section or to develop those lessons. Sometimes you get very descriptive

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ethnographic papers that might describe an interesting traditional practice, but without any sense of context, without any sense of critique. Is this something that is threatened or are there policies around it?

A second challenge in the articles has always been to prompt authors to not use or rely too heavily on discipline-specific jargon and instead realize that they're speaking to an audience that is trained in a range of different fields, or maybe not in academia at all.

SV: What do you consider to be your proudest achievements?

AB: A few years ago, a friend of mine, who was at the State Department in the Cultural Heritage Centre, said to me that the IJCP was the only journal that, when the new issue came out, the entire department would read cover to cover. That was the best thing I could have heard! Our policymakers think that what we're writing is important. First of all, it means that we're not just insular academics speaking about things that don't have any resonances and that we're not speaking with so much jargon that it's impenetrable to non-experts or people outside the discipline. It was also that these are the quality of the work that we're doing and we're publishing. It is the kind that policymakers want to read because they want to learn what's going on or what's being thought of. So that's one of sort of the two things I'm most proud of.

SV: And what is the second thing you are most proud of?

AB: The other thing that I'm most proud of was something I only became aware of when I announced that I was stepping down, which is that there are so many amazing scholars in the field today whose work I really respect, who are doing the most interesting work, and who had their first paper published in the IJCP. I was shocked. They're so many people who are doing such great work in countries all over the world whose work we published. And that thrills me, it is something that a journal can do; it can speak to a policy maker and also help to launch careers of people whose work needs to be heard and give confidence to young scholars when academic publishing can be so demoralizing. People are joking about the awful reviews that they got from the first or second reviewer. We have turned down articles, but when we have, we've provided a lot of constructive criticism.

SV: How things have changed in the last 20 years? You mentioned the widening definition of heritage and critical heritage studies.

AB: Heritage studies and critical heritage studies are more mature as a discipline there are many MA programs in heritage studies in the USA, Australia, and Europe. However, a lot of this writing, especially using Laurajane Smith's important concept of AHD "authorised heritage discourse" is becoming very formulaic, very repetitive, and not really based on long, rich, deep engagements with their subject area. They're written as one-year research paper programs and sometimes; if that includes fieldwork, it's ethnographic fieldwork, it's like what a friend of mine has termed "weekend ethnography": they go, and they watch some policy discussion taking place one day, and then they decide to write a paper about how heritage is mobilized within this arena but it has no substance. There's no real effect. It's repeating stuff that we already know. There's almost, an industry of heritage degree programs and heritage professionals, and it's very repetitive and it doesn't really move in any helpful direction at this point.

SV: A recent development is the use of AI in teaching and academia, what are the challenges?

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AB: I can't deal with AI with teaching. So I couldn't even imagine it with journal editing. I heard that AI is the most insidious with grant proposals because the more formulaic our academic conventions are, for example, what you need to include in a piece of writing, what it must contain, certain ways and formats, the more AI can be used and the harder it will be to identify.

I teach writing at my school. talk about elements of the essay, how to set up a thesis, and how to articulate it, and some of this is very formulaic. There are academic conventions to be followed. For example, you provide some context, then the disruption of the context, and a puzzle, followed by the literature. Some people debate this, and some people say this, but nobody has considered this third thing and this is what I will discuss in my paper. So it ends up being this very formulaic kind of writing and whenever you have that, AI becomes easier to penetrate.

Does that mean that there's no place for AI? Well, if we like those conventions, then maybe AI can help coach people to structure their papers. I'm trying to think generously about it. Instinctively, as a writer, I like the idea of just writing with a piece of paper and a pen.
But as an anthropologist, we talk about Pierre Bourdieu, habits, and practices, and structuring structures. We create the patterns that structure our lives by our practices and then those patterns become sort of automated in our lives and then structure us. So are we active agents? Do we have free will or are we acting out some predetermined path in that sense? Giddens and Bourdieu both talk about that sort of interaction between the individual practice and those structuring habits. AI is like structuring habits.
I suppose, what would be really interesting is if one developed A and said "write a paper or help me start a paper on X but only using my own other papers as the information to draw on." That would be fascinating because that AI program would use your own voice as the structuring practices, which is honestly what we do when we habitually write another paper.
SV: Your advice for authors was to avoid jargon specifics discipline, and explain why their research is important. What is your advice to me as [the] incoming Editor in Chief?

AB: When I started editing the journal, I did it with that sort of graduate student confidence and naivete. I barely ever consulted with any other person I knew who edited a journal about how it worked or what to do. I just assumed that I could do it. I have some friends who edited journals at the time, Lynn Meskell had just started the Journal of Social Archaeology. I followed my instincts as an author in other journals. My experience was largely so negative that I wanted to be an editor who was fair and supportive. And maybe that's why so many people published their early papers in the IJCP, because they got a sympathetic editor who was willing to say, let's do this and do that. I don't know what else my advice should be. I always liked it when an author wrote to me personally to ask whether an article would be suitable, and I would say don't hesitate to write the editor to say, you know, would this be appropriate or what do you think of something like this?

SV: Great advice and I am looking forward to interesting conversations with authors.

AB: Exactly!

SV: Do you have a favorite article?

AB: There are a lot of wonderful articles that we've published over the years. Sometimes the debates are really fun, we get articles where people debate things, that's always a really good, fun thing to do.

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One of my favorite articles was written by one of my friends, Sita Reddy,[1] who is in India, Hyderabad right now; she was at the Smithsonian Centre for Folklife at the time. She wrote a piece about Indian biological heritage. It's just a beautifully, elegantly written paper. I use it when I teach, not only because it's an interesting case study, but I use it in my classes to teach writing because it's set up really beautifully and it's an elaborate and complicated argument with a series of different case studies that illuminate different aspects of the issue. It's really beautifully crafted as a paper.

SV: How did you manage the pressure associated with the role of Editor in Chief?

AB: The most stressful times are when I fall behind deadlines, which was my Achilles heel. I was juggling too many things and it was hard to do that. So that was one stressor and the other stressor is when you occasionally get a hostile author or an author who was annoyed at something that was published, or people threatening libel lawsuits, which occasionally happens when you deal with collectors, people's legacies, or other legal issues. We've published articles that other journals didn't want to touch because of that.

So I continue to be cautious when authors are writing things like that and I advise them to use ambiguous or hedging words to soften any direct accusations, especially about people themselves.

But I never wanted to silence any voices. If you made a cogent argument, even if I disagreed with it, let's have that debate. Let's have that discussion. I think it's important to bring different voices and perspectives to pick apart these complicated issues. There isn't just one right thing. Michael Brown used to say about Indigenous culture in his book *Who Owns Native Culture?* that sometimes laws have unintended consequences, that they can prevent members of a given cultural group from expressing themselves freely. You can only use this kind of material or make this rug in a particular way or whatever it is and for the sake of preservation of that, does that mean that there should be no regulations, that we just let things disappear? But it's an interesting discussion and debate to have. And so different perspectives should be brought to bear on these questions.
SV: Any last advice?

AB: My first advice would be, with regard to the content, to follow your own instincts and if you know the rules, you make the rules and you can break the rules.

Then, another piece of advice that I did not follow enough is to rely more heavily on your group of editors, either the broader editorial board or the associate group of editors you delegate tasks to. I didn't do that nearly enough and it killed me. I was always hesitant to demote people who weren't doing their job. But, you know, you can use me. I'll be like the hired gun. You can call me in to fire people when you need that, "I'm sorry Sophie decided that you're just not pulling your weight anymore. So thank you for your service."

SV: Thank you, for offering to be my "hired gun"! It has been really informative talking with you and thinking about the next steps for the journal.

AB: It'll be exciting.

[1] Reddy, S. (2006) 'Making Heritage Legible: Who Owns Traditional Medical Knowledge?', *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 13(2), pp. 161–188. doi:10.1017/S0940739106060115.

SV: You have done amazing work in the last 20 years, laying the foundations for interdisciplinarity and inviting different voices to discuss heritage issues. I am now looking forward to the challenges of editing the journal, although probably not for the next 20 years!

AB: Thank you. That's very sweet.

SV: What are you going to do with all your free time?

AB: Since I have none and I already had none to begin with, I still have none! But I am desperately hoping to write some of my own thoughts on this topic. I've been recently thinking about the pragmatics of heritage and the ways in which heritage practices can produce particular futures.[2] So I'm hoping to develop that further.

SV: Are you going to submit an article to the journal very soon?

AB: Yes, well that would be nice, but first I was thinking of a book!

SV: Well, good luck with the book, and thank you again for your great editorship of the journal!

[2] Bauer, A. A. (2021). Itineraries, iconoclasm, and the pragmatics of heritage. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 21(1), 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605320969097

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