

RESEARCH PAPER

# Skulls from the Past: Archaeological Negotiations of Scientific Racism

Johannes Siapkas

This paper examines the permeation of scientific racism in classical archaeology during the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, it investigates the anthropological studies of graves from the Swedish excavations at Asine and the British excavations at Mycenae and the appropriation of these results in classical archaeology. Terms like archaeological culture, people, race, in general and in precise forms, were used metonymically to signify clear-cut bounded entities with diachronically immutable characteristic traits. I argue that there were epistemological similarities between scientific racism and culture-historical archaeology since both are founded on essentialism.

This article has further epistemological implications since it illustrates that foundational analytical practices, like categorizations and constructions of archaeological cultures, have conceptual affinities with discourses that many of us today find troubling. This can serve to foster critical reflection and to illustrate that histories of archaeology can contribute to the advancement of the epistemology of archaeology.

## Introduction

In this contribution I aim to explore the conceptual similarities between scientific racism and archaeology during the 1920s and 1930s. During this period the notion of archaeological culture gained wider currency through the works of Gordon Childe (1925; 1929) and Gustaf Kossina (1911; 1928). The term 'archaeological culture' was associated with the notions 'people' and 'race'. The notion of race, as an objective biological category pertinent to the ordering of humans, had already been criticized by, for instance, Franz Boas (1911) and Ruth Benedict (1945). However, it was only after the Second World War that the concept of race was widely stigmatized. The shift in the general opinion is indicated by UNESCO's report *The Race Question*, in which the notion of race was debunked (Montagu 1951). The gradual shift in attitude towards the notion of race in anthropology and the public opinion, has received considerable attention (e.g. Barkan 1992; Wade 2004). Nevertheless race, often viewed as a biologically immutable category, continues to hold sway in various contexts, and publications which debunk the notion of race altogether, or the social and cultural dimension of race, appear with more or less regular frequency (e.g. Liss 1998: 127). The development of various techniques to analyze DNA has revitalized debates about race and the biological foundations of identities. In other words, in the early twentieth century race was evidenced through biological somatic traits which were ascribed with meaning,

whereas today it is often evidenced through DNA. Accordingly, anthropologists have also refuted the significance of DNA for the construction of race (e.g. Brodwin 2002). However, the scholarly critique has not prevented the re-emergence of racist political discourses in, for instance, several European nations. Despite the profound criticism, race remains a salient notion.

The history of scientific racism and the influences of it on academic disciplines has received varying attention. For instance, in studies of the history of anthropology scientific racism has received considerable attention (e.g. Stocking 1968; 1987; 1996; Zimmerman 2001; Brodwin 2002; Ljungström 2004; Wade 2004; Trubeta 2013). The permeation of archaeology by scientific racism has also been discussed (see e.g. Gosden 2006), and several studies have scrutinized the appropriation of scientific racism in classical studies (e.g. Leoussi 1998; Challis 2010; 2013; 2016). Likewise, several publications have illuminated how race discourses influenced acquisitions and exhibitions of skulls and human remains in museums during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g. Fabian 2010; Nowak-Kemp and Galanakis 2012; Galanakis and Nowak-Kemp 2013; Redman 2016).

Nevertheless, some features of this interrelation have so far remained unnoticed by scholarship. This article will revolve around the engaging of the Swedish physical anthropologist Carl M. Fürst to analyze the anthropological material—a code word for human skeletons at the time—from the Swedish excavations in Asine and the British excavations in Mycenae in the 1920s. The results of Fürst's analysis were appropriated in archaeological publications and used to evidence a historical synthesis. This contribution will illuminate how scientific racism was

negotiated in culture-historical archaeology during the 1920s and 1930s. The discursive resemblances between these two academic fields reside in how essentialist assumptions about human races and cultures are invested with analytical meaning.

The wider implications of this paper are that histories of archaeology shed light also on present day archaeological practices. Histories of archaeology contribute to the explication of the epistemology of contemporary archaeology since discursive practices are seldom abandoned. The conceptualization of scholarship as progressively developing through successive paradigms, which permeates, for instance, Bruce Trigger's seminal *A History of Archaeological Thought* (1989), has been questioned during the last decade (see Hillerdal and Siapakas 2015). Nevertheless, we continue to legitimize our research by evoking previously neglected philosophies and philosophers. Similarly, there are also deep-seated foundational notions and practices which persist. As will become evident further down, the conceptual similarities between scientific racism and culture-historical archaeology was facilitated by the construction of archaeological cultures and the association of these with peoples. These practices continue to be foundational in archaeology—despite the coming and going of paradigms and turns.<sup>1</sup>

### The Asine Committee

The Swedish excavations at Asine were conducted between 1922 and 1930. The campaign of 1926 was the most extensive, and it produced the largest amount of evidence, including graves dated from the Early Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Period. The bulk of finds from the 1926 campaign were sent to Sweden and these are today housed at Uppsala University. This was part of an exchange of archaeological material between Greece and Sweden which was regulated by an official treaty.<sup>2</sup> The Asine excavation was the first official Swedish excavation in the Mediterranean area. This in the sense that it was the first excavation which was organized and administered by Swedish authorities, through the newly established Asine Committee. The excavations were facilitated by the personal interest of the Swedish Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf—King Gustaf VI Adolf between 1950 and 1973—who had visited the place and expressed a personal interest to start Swedish excavations in Greece. The Crown Prince was the chairman of the Asine Committee which also included amongst others Martin P. Nilsson, Chair in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History at Lund University, Carl-Axel Moberg, Chair in Archaeology at the University of Gothenburg, and Bernhard Sahlin the Director of The Swedish National Heritage Board (see Frödin, Persson and Westholm 1938, preface). The Crown Prince and Nilsson were the two strong members of the Asine Committee.

The excavations were directed by Axel W. Persson, Chair in Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University between 1924 and 1951, and Otto Frödin an experienced Scandinavian archaeologist from The Swedish History Museum. In addition to the obvious aim to further our knowledge of the past, the excavations also aimed to

introduce Scandinavian archaeological field methods to classical archaeology (Hägg, Nordquist and Wells 1996: 9). Furthermore, it was hoped that a substantial Swedish presence in Greece would facilitate the establishment of a Swedish institute in Greece. The Swedish Institute in Athens was inaugurated in May 1948.

### Physical anthropology of Asine

Fürst was a prominent public person in Sweden. He had been a personal friend of the Swedish King Oscar II and served as the king's personal medical doctor. He had collaborated with Gustaf Retzius, a prominent Swedish physical anthropologist (see Ljungström 2004), in a anthropometric study which comprised skull measurements of ca 45.000 Swedish men (Retzius and Fürst 1902). Fürst (1912; 1914) had, furthermore, analyzed Neolithic skulls and refuted theories which claimed that the Sapmi were the ancestors of the Swedes. He was also entrusted with the reexamination of the graves of the Swedish kings Magnus Ladulås and Karl XII (Fürst 1920).

The excavations in Asine found many graves which contained human skeletons. In order to analyze these the Asine Committee approached Fürst and requested him to examine the anthropological material (Frödin, Persson and Westholm 1938: 12). The graves from the excavations in Asine, Mycenae and Dendra were filled and encapsulated in plaster and then sent to Sweden where they were examined by Fürst in his laboratory at Lund University. They were returned to Greece after Fürst's examination (Fürst 1930: 3–12; 1932: 225; Trubeta 2013: 69 n.21). He published his analysis in *Zur Anthropologie der prähistorischen Griechen in Argolis: nebst Beschreibungen einiger älteren Schädel aus historischer Zeit* (1930), and summarized the examination of the material from Mycenae in "Appendix: The Skulls" in *Chamber Tombs at Mycenae* (Wace 1932). Fürst's analysis is detailed and it addresses, for instance, nutritional and pathological aspects of the bones. Nevertheless, the skulls receive the most elaborate attention in Fürst's study. There is no qualitative difference between the analysis of the skulls from Asine, Mycenae and Dendra.<sup>3</sup> Each and every skull was analyzed meticulously, and the cephalic index has a prominent place in the analysis. Fürst is careful to determine the cephalic index for each skull and uses it to construct racial taxonomies. The racial categories, such as dolichocephalic, mesocephalic and brachycephalic, are used to establish who the makers of a culture were (see below for the emergence, construction, and impact of these categories). For instance, it was the cephalic index that led Fürst to conclude that the population in Late Helladic Mycenae consisted of two races (Fürst 1932: 231–232). Similarly in the 1930 publication, Fürst draws conclusions about the makers of the culture in Asine. For instance, the skull with the reference number 20 FA, which has a cephalic index of 91,2 and is high brachycephalic, leads Fürst to the following conclusion: "*Der Schädel 20 FA ist also der erste sichere anthropologische Beweis für eine direkt oder indirekte früzeitige Völkerverbindung zwischen dem inneren Vorderasien und Griechenland (Argolis).*" (Fürst 1930: 57,

italics in original).<sup>4</sup> In other words, Fürst uses phrenology and scientific racism to draw conclusions about historical processes.

### The rise of the cephalic index

Broadly, race refers to discourses which ascribe social and cultural meaning to the biological variations of humans: “when biology is given social force” as Chris Gosden (2006: 2) once put it. Somatic, external traits on the body—such as skin colour, hair colour, and measurements of various parts of the body—are viewed as significant. They are used as criteria in analytical schemes which divide humans into different groups—that is, races. The somatic traits are, furthermore, often assumed to correspond to inner characteristics of the races. For instance, brachycephalism was viewed as an indication of specific mental capacities. The inner characteristics that correspond to the somatic traits were then in turn used to explain social, cultural or political conditions in the present and in the past. Scientific racism was a large academic field and a plethora of traits and indexes, defined in different ways, were attributed significance (for a critical, and by now classic, overview, see Gould 1996). That is, different scholars interpreted the indexes in different ways; a common interpretation, following Gobineau was that dolichocephalism, identified as a trait of Aryans and Indo-Germanic peoples, was superior to brachycephalism (see Arvidsson 2006: 43), but this conclusion was disputed by Paul Broca and others (see Gould 1996: 131).

Some prominent early examples of criteria used to categorize and index humans are the following. The Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus classified humanity into four races on the basis of skin colour in his seminal *Systema Naturae* (Linné and Haak 1735). Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1795), often viewed as the father of physical anthropology, introduced craniometry in the late eighteenth century. The Dutch anatomist Petrus Camper (1794) championed the facial angle, and in the nineteenth century the British anthropologist John Beddoe (1862) considered hair colour and the size of the mandible as determining criteria for human races (see Lorimer 1988, for further examples). Another measurement that was widespread was the size of the brain. That is, scholars measured the cavity in the skull where the brain had been; the larger brain a race had, the more intelligent was it considered to be (see Gould 1996; Fabian 2010). The physiognomic principle was, in other words, a cornerstone for scientific racism.

The cephalic index emerged and gained wider currency during the 1840s and 1850s. The cephalic index is the result of the measurement of the width of the skull, as seen from above, multiplied with 100 and then divided with the length of the skull. Several scientists introduced a cephalic index independently from each other. In Sweden, the anatomist Anders Retzius, the father of the above mentioned Gustaf Retzius, had introduced a cephalic index in *Om formen af nordboernes cranier* (1843). Arthur de Gobineau also advocated a cephalic index in his infamous *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853). In Germany, the cephalic index was the favoured method

among nineteenth-century anthropologists (Zimmerman 1999: 412). In 1886 an international conference was organized by German anthropologists to remedy this situation. As a result *The International Agreement on the Classification and Nomenclature of the Cephalic Index*, also known as the Frankfurt agreement, was signed (see Garson 1887). From now on there was an international standard for the cephalic index. A cephalic index between 70 and 75 was denoted as dolichocephalic, between 75 and 80 as mesocephalic, and between 80 and 85 as brachycephalic. There were also further categories at each end of the scale, but these three categories are the most common. The Frankfurt agreement was initiated by Johannes Ranke, physical anthropologist at Munich University, and Rudolph Virchow, anthropologist and polymath in Berlin.

The gradually increasing importance invested in the cephalic index can in part be explained by specialization. For instance, Linnaeus was concerned with the biological variation of humanity as a whole in *Systema Naturae* (Linné and Haak 1735). However, the majority of research in scientific racism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was concerned with parts of humanity, subdivisions of the larger categories established during the eighteenth century. The heuristic emphasis on the skull and in particular on the cephalic index mirrors this specialization. The cephalic index was viewed as a fruitful instrument for the distinction between European, or Indo-European, races. The major categories which were introduced during the eighteenth century were no longer the focus. Scientific racism reached unprecedented levels in the first half of the twentieth century. It was during this period that eugenic practices and scientific centres for race studies were established in many nations. Scientific racism was operationalized and used by nations for political and social purposes (see e.g. Stocking 1988; 1996; Gould 1996; Turda and Weindling 2006; Trubeta 2013).

In classical archaeology, the cephalic index was appropriated already during the 1880s as a prominent heuristic device. For instance, in *Alttröjanische Gräber und Schädel* (1882), Virchow barely mentions the bones from the bodies and concentrates his investigation on the skulls. Although he accounts for many different measurements of various kinds, he nevertheless gives pride of place to the cephalic index. He is very careful to establish a cephalic index for each and every skull and to use the ensuing taxonomy in his account. Similarly, when British archaeologists excavated graves in Zakro on Crete in 1901, they collected only the skulls for analysis (see Whitley 2015: 14). In W. Boyd Dawkins' (1900/1901) account it is the cephalic index which is featured and used in a discussion concerning the racial taxonomy of the prehistoric inhabitants of the Aegean area. In other words, although several measurements of bones and skulls were noted, not the least in the appendices which often accompany these articles, it is nevertheless the cephalic index which is featured in the analytical accounts. The cephalic index was widely used in classical archaeology and can be regarded as a prominent discursive articulation of scientific racism.

### Archaeological negotiations of scientific racism

Fürst's study of the anthropological material appeared eight years before the final publication of the Swedish excavations at Asine: *Asine: Results of The Swedish Excavations 1922–1930* (Frödin, Persson and Westholm 1938). In *Asine* the graves are presented in two chapters; one chapter is authored by Frödin (1938: 115–146) and one chapter is authored by Persson (1938: 336–428). These two chapters differ both in style and content. Frödin is careful to mention both the cephalic index of each skull, and to refer back to Fürst's publication from 1930. He is, furthermore, very cautious in the conclusions of his chapter; keeping them vague and general. Here, Frödin does not mention the cephalic index neither does he draw any conclusions regarding races or archaeological cultures. In contrast, in Persson's account of the graves there is no mention of either the cephalic index or Fürst's study. His account is instead rich in references to contemporary culture-historical archaeology. He refers in particular to Childe's *The Danube in Prehistory* (1929) and to several studies by Alan Wace and Carl Blegen.<sup>5</sup>

In the "Preface" of *The Danube in Prehistory*, Childe defines the notion of archaeological culture:

'We find certain types of remains – pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites, house forms – constantly recurring together. Such a complex of regularly associated traits we shall term a "cultural group" or just a "culture". We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what would today be called a "people". Only where the complex in question is regularly and exclusively associated with skeletal remains of a specific physical type would we venture to replace "people" by the term "race"' (Childe 1929: v–vi).

In other words, distributive patterns of archaeological finds are abstracted into archaeological cultures which express a people or a race. There is a metonymic relation between archaeological finds, cultures, peoples and races. The terms substitute for each other in the text, although the burden of proof for the use of race is higher in Childe's view. The metonymic relation between these concepts is also evident in the analysis of the archaeological cultures. Childe does not hesitate to employ physical anthropology in his analysis. He uses, for instance, the sub-headings "craniology" and "races" for sections in which scientific racism is discussed (see, e.g. Childe 1929: 44–45).

The epistemology of the culture-historical archaeology has received considerable scholarly attention, and there is no need for tedious repetitions here. Suffice to say, that archaeological cultures, peoples and races, as well as archaeological periods, are conceptualized as clear-cut bounded monolithic entities in culture-historical archaeology. Another epistemological assumption in culture-historical archaeology is that a people retain a core of deep-seated essential characteristic traits throughout history (see Jones 1997: 15–25; Siapkas 2003: 46–59; 2014). Furthermore, the distribution of characteristic archaeological finds and archaeological cultures reflects the

distribution of a people according to the logic of culture-historical archaeology (Siapkas 2014: 69). The direct association between archaeological finds and people is also an epistemological cornerstone in diffusionist explanatory models which were common in late nineteenth and early twentieth century archaeology (e.g. Montelius 1899; Childe 1925).

The terms culture, people, and race are also used in a similar vein by Wace and Blegen in several publications about the Aegean Bronze Age. The archaeological results produced by Wace and Blegen were important for the excavations of Asine, and the Swedish excavations contributed to substantiate the analytical models which had been introduced by Wace and Blegen. In particular, *Asine* contributed detail to the Middle Helladic Period. In their seminal article *The Pre-Mycenaean Pottery of the Mainland* (1916) Wace and Blegen introduced a tripartite scheme for the Helladic Bronze Age. Their analysis was based on the correlation of ceramic sequences from several excavations on mainland Greece. According to them, the transition between Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age was caused by the arrival of a new people:

'The period of Minyan Ware indicates the introduction of a new cultural strain, the origin of which is not yet clear . . . It is impossible to tell how much of the Early Helladic element had been previously absorbed by Minyan Ware, though it must be admitted from the evidence at present before us, that there is a distinct break between the two, Early Helladic Ware disappearing almost completely on the advent of Minyan. Though Early Helladic Ware disappeared, it need not necessarily mean that a race so numerous and so widespread, to judge merely by the distribution of Early Helladic Ware on the mainland, should have been obliterated. The importance of the elucidation of this and kindred questions lies in the light they throw on the ethnological origin and affinities of the race that inhabited historical Greece' (Wace and Blegen 1916: 189).

The Middle Helladic Period is associated with a new ceramic ware which is introduced by the arrival of new people—the new cultural strain, in the quote. Like Childe in the earlier quote above, Wace and Blegen associate the distribution of a ceramic ware with a people. Additionally, Wace and Blegen also reiterate the so-called two-race model which was widespread in scientific racism (see also Boyd Dawkins 1900/1901). According to the two-race model, a society consists of one governing race and one subjugated race. Typically, the governing race has conquered the other race and constitutes a ruling minority (see Arvidsson 2006: 57; Blix 2009: 45). According to this discourse, the culture of the governing race is more visible, which explains why archaeological cultures are associated with the ruling social strata. In Wace and Blegen's model, the newcomers who introduced the Minyan Ware did not eradicate the earlier population but subjugated them, thus establishing a two-race society.

Wace also articulated the culture-historical perspective in other publications. The accounts of the British excavations at Mycenae 1920 to 1923 are very descriptive. The emphasis in these publications is placed on the presentation of the finds (e.g. Lamb and Wace 1919; Wace et al. 1921; Wace 1932; 1949). However, *Mycenae: An Archaeological History and Guide* (Wace 1949), contains a historical synthesis authored by Wace. In it he repeats that the Middle Helladic Period was introduced by the arrival of the first Greeks (Wace 1949: 20–25). The collaboration with Fürst is only mentioned explicitly in a review by Wace (1931: 129), but not in the publications of the excavations of Mycenae (e.g. Wace 1932; 1949). Furthermore, Wace refrained from incorporating the phrenological results in his presentation and analysis of the excavations at Mycenae. He excluded the phrenological results even in the presentations of the graves which had produced human skeletons, such as Tomb 514 (Wace 1932: 48–50; cf. Fürst 1932: 226–227) and in relevant sections such as the one entitled “Attitude of the skeletons” (Wace 1932: 139–140). In other words, physical anthropology was employed in order to analyze evidence produced by the excavations, but the results of the anthropological investigations were not explicitly incorporated into the archaeological narratives even though they confirmed the culture-historical analytical model for the Aegean Bronze Age.

It is time to return to *Asine* and the conclusions, or the historical synthesis, authored by Persson. His account of the transition between the Early Helladic Period and the Middle Helladic Period merits quotation:

‘At the beginning of the M. H. period, which in round figures might be put down at 2000 B. C., there occurs a break in the development which can only be explained by assuming a fresh element of people on the Greek mainland. At Asine, the same as elsewhere, wherever M. H. culture strata are superimposed on E. H. strata, is found a more or less thick fire stratum. One may be justified in assuming in the immigrants to see the first Indo-Europeans, the Ionians, if we follow the ancient term used for the Greek tribes and adhere to the tradition about their immigration. These Indo-Europeans came very like from the Upper Balkans, and some of them seem to have separated already to the north of the Bosphorus and penetrated into Thrace and Macedonia. Those who crossed the Bosphorus, again divided into two currents, one which went east, forming the Indo-European super stratum in the subsequent Hittite kingdom, the other followed the coast [sic] of Asia Minor southward and thence overran the islands in the Aegean Sea and reached the Greek mainland’ (Frödin, Persson and Westholm 1938: 433).

In this quote, Persson mirrors expressions and assumptions used in the above mentioned quotes by Fürst, Childe, and Wace and Blegen. Accordingly, the superimposition of the peoples mentioned by Persson is an articulation of the two-race model which was also mentioned in the quote

by Wace and Blegen (Wace and Blegen 1916: 189). Second, Persson, like Wace and Blegen, adheres to the view that new major archaeological cultures, or periods, are introduced by the arrival of a new people. The Middle Helladic Period is introduced by the Ionians, the first Indo-Europeans. Interestingly, Persson had already proposed this scheme in 1924 in a preliminary report from the Asine excavations (Frödin and Persson 1924: 78–79). Third, the identification of the Ionians as the race which introduced the Middle Helladic Period complies with Fürst’s analysis of skull 20 FA. Remember, this was a skull with the high brachycephalic cephalic index, and, according to Fürst, the earliest anthropological evidence of contacts between the inner parts of southwest Asia and mainland Greece (Fürst 1930: 56–57). Persson traces the origins of the Ionians to the Upper Balkans. From there they moved southwards and wandered into Asia Minor, where they split into two groups. The first group became the ruling race in the Hittite kingdom and the second group introduced the Middle Helladic Period in Asine and on mainland Greece. Furthermore, skull 20 FA belonged to a skeleton which was buried in a contracted position. This is regarded as a diagnostic cultural trait of the Middle Helladic/Ionian culture by Persson (see Frödin, Persson and Westholm 1938: 336–428). A contracted burial is emphasized by Persson as the cultural trait which associates the Ionians with the Upper Balkans. For this purpose he relies on *The Danube in Prehistory* in which Childe argues that contracted burials, together with brachycephalism, are diagnostic features of the so-called Danordic culture (see Childe 1929: 112–145).

The historical synthesis which Persson presents in *Asine* is permeated by several foundational notions of the culture-historical perspective. The tracing of the origins of the Ionians to the Upper Balkans is based on the assumption that archaeological cultures are associated with peoples and that diagnostic features are immutable. That is, the mere presence of a diagnostic feature is viewed as evidence for the distribution of the makers of that particular culture. Like Wace, Persson does not use the physical anthropological terminology explicitly. There is a terminological variation in the publications of *Asine*. Fürst and Frödin use the term brachycephalic, whereas Persson uses the terms Ionians, Greeks, Indo-Europeans. However, the terminological variation does not indicate epistemological differences. Regardless of which specific terms each of them used, they conceptualized cultures, peoples and races in accordance with the essentialist assumptions which were widespread in nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship. Needless to say, this illustrates that archaeology is also conditioned by contemporary ideas and discourses.

### Scientific racism vs personal engagement

Before the conclusion I want to make a brief remark. Scientific racism was widespread and commonly accepted during the first half of the twentieth century. I am inclined to concur with Jennifer Hecht’s (2000: 304) conclusion: “I would argue . . . that we have little idea today of how utterly convinced many people were that the European races were physiologically measurable and socially irreconcilable.”

Race was regarded as a social and cultural factor which explained the present and the past. We should therefore expect to find assumptions of scientific racism in many publications from that time. The notion of race has since then been stigmatized. Researching the history of archaeology and illuminating how older generations of colleagues were influenced by scientific racism is therefore, occasionally, precarious. Some colleagues read these publications as moral demonizations of older colleagues and find it necessary to defend the profession against insulting accusations. They misconceive the unboxing of epistemological foundations as personal insults. These reactions serve us ill, however, since they reduce historiography to simplistic blame games.

Persson's historical synthesis is, in all but the choice of terminology, adhering to notions of scientific racism. His explanation of the past is based on epistemological foundations shared by culture-historical archaeology and scientific racism. However, the scientific racism that is articulated in Persson's scholarship, can be contrasted with his personal commitment to humanitarian aid. A few years after the publication of *Asine*, Persson was stationed in Tripolis, Greece, in the service of the Swedish Red Cross. During the Second World War, between 1942 and 1945, the Swedish Red Cross distributed aid to the starving Greek population. Persson and other Swedish scholars were instrumental for the success of the Swedish Red Cross (see Mauzy 2008). In other words, Persson was, on one hand, influenced by scientific racism in his scholarly production, and, on the other, concerned with the effects of a war shaped by race discourses. Persson's contradictory attitudes towards race discourses is in line with a broader pattern among contemporary scholars. For instance, Virchow and Nilsson, both mentioned above, articulated scientific racism in their scholarly production (see Virchow 1882; Nilsson 1923: 16–23; 1952). However, like Persson, these two scholars also showed in practice that they were concerned with the effects of racial discrimination (see Zimmerman 1999; Svenbro 2005).

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, then, neither Swedish nor British archaeologists during the 1920s and 1930s hesitated to engage physical anthropologists for the analysis of human skeletons. However, the phrenological racial taxonomies were not used in a straightforward way by the archaeologists. The epistemological convergences between culture-historical archaeology and scientific racism reside instead in the common adherence to essentialism. That is, despite variations in detail, both culture-historical archaeology and scientific racism are founded on the assumption that people have deep-seated immutable inner traits which are articulated in their culture. Furthermore, these perspectives are also governed by the assumption that somatic traits correspond with inner characteristics. The similar epistemological assumptions were, however, articulated through different terms. The anthropologists used terms like brachycephalic, but the archaeologists preferred terms like Middle Helladic Period, the Ionians, or the Indo-Europeans.

In other words, this article testifies to the situatedness of archaeology. It has further epistemological implications since it illustrates that foundational analytical practices, like categorizations and constructions of archaeological cultures, have conceptual affinities with discourses that many of us today find troubling. This can serve to foster critical reflection and to illustrate that histories of archaeology can contribute to the advancement of the epistemology of archaeology.

The history of archaeology has received considerable attention recently and this interest has contributed to advance our understanding of archaeology. In particular these studies remind us that external factors, as well as internal factors, shape our conceptualizations of the past. However, while recognizing the contributions in this field, I find it unsettling that the positivistic empiricism which has constrained much of modern archaeology has also been appropriated in histories of archaeology. In other words, I find all too many studies of history of archaeology focus on the achievements of individual scholars and are governed by a biographical narrative structure. Histories of archaeology is on the verge of becoming an academic field governed by historiographic positivism. We have critiqued and deconstructed more or less every aspect of archaeology but the constructivist concerns have not been incorporated into histories of archaeology (see Kuukkanen 2012; 2015 for a similar claim). In this contribution I have attempted to move beyond historiographic positivism and present a history of archaeology which emphasizes the epistemological foundations of archaeology.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities under Enboms Donation Fund. This article has been presented at a seminar at Uppsala University, and at The History of Archaeology Research Network Conference in Glasgow, 1st September 2015. It has benefited in particular by comments and suggestions by Frands Herschend, Dimitrios Iordanoglou, Michael Fotiadis, Lena Sjögren, and an anonymous reviewer. The usual disclaimers apply.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In processual archaeology, attempts have been made to whitewash these concepts and argue that they may be neutral, see e.g. Roberts and Vander Linden (2011) also for further references. This is a redundant debate since the possible neutrality of the concepts does not in any way preclude the discursive implications of these concepts in the 1920s and 1930s.
- <sup>2</sup> The treaty is preserved in *Asinekommitténs arkiv* (The archive of the Asine Committee) housed in *Antikvarisk-Topografiska Arkivet* in The Swedish National Heritage Board.
- <sup>3</sup> The material from Dendra is small, and I will not discuss it here, mainly due to limitations of space.

<sup>4</sup> A rough translation: “The skull 20 FA is therefore the earliest secure anthropological evidence of a direct or indirect connection in early times between the peoples of the inner parts of southwest Asia and Greece (Argolis).”

<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable that Kossina is not mentioned at all in *Asine*, since German scholarship was in high esteem at the time, and Swedish archaeologists, specializing in Scandinavian archaeology, had close associations with Kossina.

## References

- Arvidsson, S** 2006 *Aryan idols: Indo-European mythology as ideology and science*. Translated from Swedish by Wichmann, Sonia. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Barkan, E** 1992 *The retreat of scientific racism: changing concepts of race in Britain and the United States between the world wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beddoe, J** 1862 *The races of Britain: A contribution to the anthropology of western Europe*. Reprint 1885. Bristol.
- Benedict, R** 1945 *Race: science and politics*. Rev. ed. New York: The Viking press.
- Blix, G** 2009 *From Paris to Pompeii: French romanticism and the cultural politics of archaeology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9783/9780812201307>
- Blumenbach, J F** 1795 *Elements of physiology*. Philadelphia.
- Boas, F** 1911 *The mind of primitive man*. Rev. ed. 1938. New York: Macmillan.
- Boyd Dawkins, W** 1900/1901 Skulls from Cave Burials at Zakro, *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 7: 150–155.
- Brodwin, P** 2002 Genetics, Identity, and the Anthropology of Essentialism, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75(2): 323–330. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/anq.2002.0027>.
- Camper, P** 1794 *The works of the late Professor Camper, on the connexion between the science of anatomy and the arts of drawing, painting, statuary, &c. &c. in two books. Illustrated with seventeen plates. Translated from the Dutch by T. Cogan, M.D.* London: printed for C. Dilly.
- Challis, D** 2010 ‘The Ablest Race’: The ancient Greeks in Victorian racial theory. In: Bradley, M (Ed.) *Classics and imperialism in the British Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 94–120. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199584727.003.0005>
- Challis, D** 2013 *The archaeology of race: the eugenic ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Challis, D** 2016 Skull Triangles: Flinders Petrie, Race Theory and Biometrics, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 26(1): 1–8. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bha-556>
- Childe, V G** 1925 *The Dawn of European Civilization*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Childe, V G** 1929 *The Danube in Prehistory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- de Gobineau, A** 1853 *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. 4 vols. Paris.
- Fabian, A** 2010 *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226233499.001.0001>
- Frödin, O and Persson, A W** 1924 Rapport préliminaire sur les fouilles d' Asiné. *Årsberättelse. Kungl. Humanistiska vetenskapssamfundet i Lund = Bulletin de la Société royale des lettres de Lund*, 23–93.
- Frödin, O, Persson, A W and Westholm, A** 1938 *Asine: results of the Swedish excavations 1922–1930*. Stockholm.
- Fürst, C M** 1912 *Zur Kranologie der schwedischen Steinzeit*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells.
- Fürst, C M** 1914 *Neolitische Schädel von der Insel Ösel. In Baltische Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte: Arbeiten des Baltischen Vorbereitenden Komitees für den xvi. Archäologischen Kongress in Pleskau 1914*. Berlin.
- Fürst, C M** 1920 *När de döda vittna*. Stockholm: Svenska teknologföreningens förlag.
- Fürst, C M** 1930 *Zur Anthropologie der prähistorischen Griechen in Argolis: nebst Beschreibungen einiger älteren Schädel aus historischer Zeit*. Lund: Gleerup.
- Fürst, C M** 1932 *Appendix: The Skulls*. In: Wace, A J B (Ed.) *Chamber Tombs at Mycenae*. London: The Society of Antiquaries.
- Galanakis, Y and Nowak-Kemp, M** 2013 Ancient Greek skulls in the Oxford University Museum, Part II: The Rousopoulos-Rolleston correspondence, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 25: 1–17. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhq040>
- Garson, J G** 1887 The International Agreement on the Classification and Nomenclature of the Cephalic Index, *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 16: 17–20. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2841735>
- Gosden, C** 2006 Race and racism in archaeology: introduction, *World Archaeology*, 38(1): 1–7. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438240500509702>
- Gould, S J** 1996 *The mismeasure of man*. Rev. and exp. ed. New York: Norton.
- Hägg, R, Nordquist, G C and Wells, B** 1996 *Preface*. In: Hägg, R, Nordquist, G C and Wells, B (Eds.) *Asine III: supplementary studies on the Swedish excavations 1922–1930*. Stockholm: Svenska institutet i Athen.
- Hecht, J M** 2000 Vacher de Lapouge and the Rise of Nazi Science, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61(2): 285–304. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2000.0018>
- Hillerdal, C and Siapkas, J** (eds.) 2015 *Debating Archaeological Empiricism: The Ambiguity of Material Evidence*. New York: Routledge.
- Jones, S** 1997 *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and the Present*. London: Routledge. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203438732>
- Kossina, G** 1911 *Die Herkunft der Germanen: Zur Methode der Siedlungsarchäologie*. Würzburg.
- Kossina, G** 1928 *Ursprung und Verbreitung der Germanen in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*. Leipzig: Kabitzsch.
- Kuukkanen, J-M** 2012 The missing narrativist turn in the historiography of science, *History and Theory*, 51(3): 340–363. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2012.00632.x>

- Kuukkanen, J-M** 2015 *Postnarrativist philosophy of historiography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137409874>
- Lamb, W** and **Wace, A J B** 1919 Excavations at Mycenae, *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 24: 185–209.
- Leoussi, A S** 1998 *Nationalism and Classicism. The Classical Body as National Symbol in Nineteenth-Century England and France*. London: MacMillan Press.
- Liss, J E** 1998 Diasporic Identities: the science and politics of race in the work of Franz Boas and W.E.B. Du Bois, 1894–1919, *Cultural Anthropology*, 13: 127–166. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/can.1998.13.2.127>
- Ljungström, O** 2004 *Oscariansk Antropologi: etnografi, förhistoria och rasforskning under sent 1800-tal*. Hedemora: Gidlunds förlag.
- Lorimer, D** 1988 Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology, 1870–1900, *Victorian Studies*, 31(3): 405–430.
- Mauzy, M** 2008 *Inter Arma Caritas: The Swedish Red Cross in Greece in the 1940s*. In: Clogg, R (Ed.) *Bearing gifts to Greeks: humanitarian aid to Greece in the 1940s*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Montagu, A** 1951 *Statement on race: an extended discussion in plain language of the Unesco statement by experts on race problems*. New York: Henry Schuman.
- Montelius, O** 1899 *Der Orient und Europa: Einfluss der Orientalischen Cultur auf Europa bis zur Mitte des Letzten Jahrtausends V. Chr.*, Stockholm.
- Nilsson, M P** 1923 *Primitiv kultur*. Reprint 1926. Stockholm: Norstedt.
- Nilsson, M P** 1952 *The race problem of the Roman Empire*. In *Opuscula Selecta: Linguis Anglica, Francogallica, Germanica Conscripta*, Lund. pp. 940–964. Original edition: *Hereditas* 2 (1921), pp. 370–390. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1601-5223.1921.tb02635.x>
- Nowak-Kemp, M** and **Galanakis, Y** 2012 Ancient Greek skulls in the Oxford University Museum, Part I: George Rolleston, Oxford and the formation of the human skulls collection, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 24: 89–104. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhq039>
- Redman, S J** 2016 *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Retzius, A** 1843 *Om formen af nordboernes cranier*. Stockholm.
- Retzius, G** and **Fürst, C M** 1902 *Anthropologia Suecica: Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Schweden*. Stockholm.
- Roberts, B W** and **Vander Linden, M** (eds.) 2011 *Investigating archaeological cultures: material culture, variability, and transmission*. New York: Springer.
- Siapakas, J** 2003 *Heterological Ethnicity: Conceptualizing Identities in Ancient Greece*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Siapakas, J** 2014 *Ancient Ethnicity and Modern Identity*. In: McNerney, J. (Ed.) *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.66–81. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118834312.ch5>
- Stocking, G W** 1968 *Race, culture, and evolution: Essays in the history of anthropology*. London: Collier-Macmillan.
- Stocking, G W** 1987 *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: Free Press.
- Stocking, G W** (ed.) 1988 *Bones, bodies, behavior: essays on biological anthropology*. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press.
- Stocking, G W** (ed.) 1996 *Volkgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press.
- Svenbro, J** 2005 Tre seminarier om Martin P:n Nilsson. *Glänta*, 1–2: 161–187.
- Trigger, B G** 1989 *A History of Archaeological Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trubeta, S** 2013 *Physical anthropology, race and eugenics in Greece (1880s–1970s)*. Leiden: Brill. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004257672>
- Turda, M** and **Weindling, P** (eds.) 2006 *Blood and homeland: eugenics and racial nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*. New York: Central European University Press.
- Virchow, R** 1882 *Alttrajanische Gräber und Schädel*. Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- von Linné, C** and **Haak, D** 1735 *Systema naturæ, sive regna tria naturæ systematice proposita per classes, ordines, genera, & species*. Lugduni Batavorum, apud Theodorum Haak, MDCCXXXV. Ex typographia Joannis Wilhelmi de Groot.
- Wace, A J B** 1931 Review of Myres, John L., Who were the Greeks?, *The Classical Review*, 45(4): 128–130. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0009840X00056110>
- Wace, A J B** 1932 *Chamber Tombs at Mycenae*. London: The Society of Antiquaries.
- Wace, A J B** 1949 *Mycenae: An Archaeological History and Guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wace, A J B** and **Blegen, C W** 1916 The Pre-Mycenaean Pottery of the Mainland, *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 22: 175–189. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0068245400009916>
- Wace, A J B, Heurtley, W A, Lamb, W, Holland L B** and **Boethius, C A** 1921 The Report of the School Excavations at Mycenae, 1921–1923 [corrected title: The Report of the School Excavations at Mycenae, 1920–1923], *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 25: 1–434. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0068245400010303>
- Wade, P** 2004 Human Nature and Race, *Anthropological Theory*, 4(2): 157–172. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1463499604042812>
- Whitley, J** 2015 *Scholarly Traditions and Scientific Paradigms: Method and Reflexivity in the Study of Ancient Praisos*. In: Haggis, D C and Antonaccio, C M (Eds.) *Classical archaeology in context: theory and practice in excavation in the Greek world*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 3–29. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9781934078471-005>
- Zimmerman, A** 1999 Anti-Semitism as Skill: Rudolf Virchow's *Schulstatistik* and the Racial Composition of Germany, *Central European History*, 32(4): 409–429. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900021762>
- Zimmerman, A** 2001 *Anthropology and antihumanism in Imperial Germany*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226983462.001.0001>



**How to cite this article:** Siapkas, J 2016 Skulls from the Past: Archaeological Negotiations of Scientific Racism. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 26(1): 7, 1–9, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bha-590>

**Published:** 29 November 2016

**Copyright:** © 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



*Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.

OPEN ACCESS