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Introduction

Maria Wunderlich

The *Ethnoarchaeology of Livelihood Practices* conference in Barcelona was a particular highlight during the second year of the EAZ relaunch. As an international, open and discussion-oriented forum, this conference set an important example of the relevance of ethnoarchaeological research.

Stefano Biagetti, who joined the EAZ team as editor-in-chief, played a leading role in the organization of this conference. After a brief introduction, it is a special pleasure for us to give him the floor for this year's editorial.

Stefano Biagetti is an experienced researcher who has worked extensively with pastoral societies in Africa, particularly in the Sahara, from both archaeological and anthropological perspectives. He has studied in detail the resilience of these societies in marginal environments and developed a transdisciplinary research approach. Stefano Biagetti is an ICREA research professor of archaeology at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona and a member of the Culture, Archaeology and Socio-Ecological Dynamics Research Group (CASEs).

We warmly welcome Stefano to the EAZ team!

Editorial: Confessions of a Middle-Aged Ethnoarchaeologist

Stefano Biagetti

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Having spent years immersed in the discipline, I now find myself at a point in my career where I can confidently say that ethnoarchaeology has not only shaped my research but has also defined my professional identity. The following reflections, of course, are my own; they are not meant to represent the views of the broader field but rather to offer a personal perspective on where we stand today as ethnoarchaeologists.

Ethnoarchaeology occupies a transformative position within archaeological sciences, bridging the material traces of the past with the living practices and knowledge systems of the present. More than just a method, it challenges assumptions, embraces diversity and offers a more inclusive understanding of human history.

Many papers on ethnoarchaeology begin with a justification to address common criticisms. Decades have passed since archaeologists first ventured – sometimes awkwardly – into the ethnographic present. The discipline entered the new millennium stronger, thanks in large part to Nicholas David and Carole Kramer's groundbreaking volume (David/Kramer 2001), which served as both a comprehensive handbook and a validation of ethnoarchaeology's legitimacy. Despite sharp critiques – notably from Paul Bahn (1989, 52–53) and Olivier Gosselain (2016) – ethnoarchaeology has not only survived but thrived.

Now, with the first quarter of the 21st century behind us, it is evident that ethnoarchaeologists have demonstrated remarkable creativity and resilience. The once-prevalent fear of ethnographic analogy has dissipated, as have the polemics surrounding the use of the present. Naïve approaches that once drew harsh criticism have given way to grounded models that contribute to archaeological

interpretation. Today, ethnoarchaeology is a robust field that explores human behaviour from diverse perspectives. While particularistic case studies continue to offer new insights into material culture, foodways and other practices, the discipline is increasingly embracing broader domains. Large-scale comparative studies – bridging the present with the past and encompassing diverse regions – are emerging, demonstrating ethnoarchaeology's potential to investigate human behaviour on a global scale. Mixed-method approaches that integrate quantitative and qualitative perspectives further position ethnoarchaeology as a truly global discipline.

In recent years, ethnoarchaeology has played a pivotal role in challenging the Eurocentric foundations of archaeology and questioning its Western-centric paradigms. By engaging with diverse cultural contexts, it underscores the value of marginalized knowledge systems, such as Indigenous traditions, oral histories and non-Western ecological insights. This approach not only offers a more holistic understanding of human history but also enriches archaeological interpretations while critiquing the dominance of Western scientific frameworks.

Ethnoarchaeology provides a more realistic and comprehensive understanding of human experiences by addressing both tangible and intangible aspects of societies, past and present. By connecting archaeology's material focus with ethnography's social and cultural emphasis, it uncovers themes often overlooked in traditional ethnographic studies, such as the use of space, ephemeral practices and the lifecycle of objects. By examining topics like mobility, resource management and symbolic expressions within their environmental and cultural contexts, ethnoarchaeology reveals the nuanced interplay between daily practices and societal structures. This broadens the scope of inquiry, offering a more inclusive and multi-dimensional view of history.

Ethnoarchaeology also aligns with deep history, a discipline that challenges conventional historical boundaries by extending its scope far beyond written records to embrace the entirety of human experience. Unlike traditional history, which often centers on written sources and linear progressions, deep history sidesteps Eurocentric and presentist perspectives, favouring non-Western epistemologies to understand humanity's interconnected past. It values oral traditions, Indigenous cosmologies and cyclical or non-linear views of time. This inclusive approach reframes human development not as a linear march toward modernity but as a complex web of diverse interactions with the environment. Ethnoarchaeology emphasizes continuity between past and present human behaviours, integrating tangible archaeological evidence with the intangible knowledge of living traditions. Together, ethnoarchaeology and deep history offer a holistic understanding of human experiences that transcends conventional disciplinary boundaries and embraces multiple perspectives.

Though most ethnoarchaeologists are trained in Western institutions, they have become leading advocates for integrating alternative bodies of knowledge into archaeological research. By actively incorporating Indigenous perspectives and ecological traditions, they bridge diverse epistemologies to create more equitable and comprehensive narratives of the past. My own experience – currently holding an ERC-funded Consolidator Grant focused on developing a geoethnoarchaeological methodology for studying pastoralism – stands as a testament to the growing recognition of ethnoarchaeology as a vital and innovative discipline (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Sediment sampling in a contemporary BaKalanga settlement in Maitengwe, Northern Botswana. Photo: S. Biagetti.

This ongoing effort is reflected in a growing body of publications and international conferences, further demonstrating ethnoarchaeology's role in advancing a globally relevant and inclusive field. A few weeks ago, we celebrated the international conference *Ethnoarchaeology of Livelihood* in Barcelona, an opportunity to gather and engage in vibrant discussions about the discipline. As one of the organizers – and someone navigating the 'middle-age' phase of life – I reflect on how far ethnoarchaeology has come and how it continues to attract the attention of younger generations. The most animated contributions came from young PhD students, whose insights, included in this volume of EAZ (Krubeck et al. 2024, this volume), offer fresh perspectives and inspire dialogues that will shape the future of the discipline.

Finally, I am excited to share that I am now part of the editorial board for EAZ, and I look forward to contributing to the continued growth and evolution of this platform for ethnoarchaeological scholarship.

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