

The object-interruptive: reflections on the social resonance of the archaeological find

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The contributions in this volume offer a cannily coordinated intervention in the practices and histories of Egyptian archaeology, reflecting the genuine and radical impulse behind the conception and organisation of the conference on “Forming Material Egypt” in 2013. The conference panels were carefully grouped in thematic clusters beginning with the materiality of archaeological work as a historical and positivist science: the work on the ground, the sites of discovery, the distribution of finds, the problems of conserving sites and material, and the latter set of issues was also revisited in crucial ways in a later panel on digital futures and possibilities. The critical debates surrounding the practices and their historical, cultural, geographic and theoretical ramifications were further explored in more depth on two occasions: a special panel on the history and theory of Egyptian archaeology and a final rounding discussion. The issues that have emerged as a result of the informed exchanges in this rounding discussion centred on the whole range, from site management, to conservation, to digital archiving for accessibility of knowledge. The exchanges also led to discussions over deeply set cultural and historical propensities, the exigencies of national and institutional agendas, the debatable objectivity of the discipline over against the subjectivities of practice, the need for a better informed and more committed practice of diffusionism, and finally to issues of policy making and dissemination in public awareness that may also help in directing local policies. My reflections here will centre on the issues surrounding the historical division between the private/expert spheres and the public spheres that were articulated with added insight and depth in the panel on history and theory as well as in the final rounding discussion.

The interdisciplinary focus on this historical divide and its ramifications sheds more light on the history and practices of archaeology both as a