

Interview with Dr. Kevin Garstki 2018-2019 IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow

Dr. Kevin Garstki is currently the Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. He received a Master's Degree in Social Science/Anthropology in 2009 from The University of Chicago. His Doctorate in Anthropology was completed in 2017 at The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, with a dissertation entitled, "Production and Technological Change: Ironworking in Prehistoric Ireland." His current work uses digital 3D models of sculptures from the Athienou Archaeological Project in Cyprus to supplement standard catalogue information. As the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow he organized a conference about critical archaeology in the digital age, which brought together scholars from across the globe and across disciplines.

Dr. Garstki, what are your current research interests and goals, and what projects are you currently working on?

My current research interests are focused on the integration of new technologies with existing archaeological practice in practical ways and making archaeological data as open and accessible to researchers as possible. I am co-authoring an open access, fully digital monograph, *Visualizing Votive Practice: Exploring Limestone and Terracotta Sculpture from Athienou-Malloura through 3D Models* (ASOR and The Digital Press), that uses digital 3D models of sculptures from the Athienou Archaeological Project in Cyprus to supplement standard catalogue information. My work documenting this material in 3D began in 2014, while this current project aims to advance the publication of cultural heritage material by using a multi-platform approach. This project will integrate emerging visualization technology with a model for the digital, open-access publication of research data and interpretation. The issues raised by the Cyprus project have led to the next stage in my research: utilizing digital 3D technologies to facilitate access to items of cultural heritage that have been removed from their nations of origin, particularly during colonial excavations. With a collaborator, I am beginning a project to provide digital access to an important collection of Iron Age Slovenian artifacts excavated by the Duchess of Mecklenburg at the beginning of the 20th century, dispersed to different museums in the US and Britain. This project will serve as an example of how to utilize digital technologies for robust scholarly research and provide an avenue for digital repatriation of dispersed cultural heritage.

Your work as the IEMA post-doc has centered on the uses of new digital technologies in archaeological practice. How did you get interested in this subject?

I would say my interest in “technology” broadly speaking developed early on in my graduate career. Even before my research into the use of digital technology by archaeologists, I have long been fascinated by the ways in which emergent technologies have the potential to disrupt social practices. You could see this in my doctoral work, which focused on the impact of new technologies on prehistoric populations, specifically the development of ironworking technology in the Irish Iron Age. By utilizing a multi-scalar approach to investigate the organization of iron production, my project highlighted how small-scale action can impact multiple dimensions of technological practice and, by extension, social life. This approach really proved useful in multiple contexts and in other research engaging with the socially-embedded nature of technology. As I began to use 3D scanning technologies in 2013-2014, I saw immediate parallels with the ways I envisioned prehistoric disruptive technologies, and the interest grew from there.

Whose work did you find the most inspiring for your own?

At the risk of sounding too politic, most of my graduate professors and collaborators have inspired my work in significant ways, from influencing my approaches to social theory to seeing how an academic can maintain a work/personal life balance. In particular, my PhD advisor’s (Bettina Arnold) work on modern appropriation of archaeological research has directly influenced my ethical perspectives on the archaeological record. From a distance, Marcia Anne Dobres’s work on technology in a social context was extremely formative in the development of

my thinking on technological practice.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow position? What have been the most challenging?

The most rewarding aspect of this position has been the relationships I've been able to create with the faculty and graduate students in both Anthropology and Classics. In particular, the interactions I've been able to have with students in my class far exceeded my expectations. Additionally, I have greatly enjoyed having the opportunity to interact with the scholars participating in the IEMA conference. On the flip side of this, getting all of the logistical details together as part of the conference has indeed been a challenge.

What advice would you give current graduate students working on their dissertation?

The best advice I can give to current graduate students working on their dissertations would be to find things outside of your research that also bring you joy. Writing a dissertation can feel like a never-ending slog that drains all of your mental energy. It is necessary to once in awhile take a break, read a book, watch a movie, or meet up with friends. Reconnecting with the outside world will help provide some perspective and limit the feeling of isolation that often accompanies the singular focus on your dissertation topic.

Do you have any advice for students about the applicability of practices we learn as archaeologists, such as digital technologies, for careers outside of our field or academia?

I think that most students moving towards their PhDs have in their minds an ultimate goal of working at a university as a faculty member. However, students should also be aware of the myriad of "alt-ac" jobs available to archaeology PhDs. These exist

in both the private and public sector, and often allow people to stay just as connected to the field as those in university positions. As it relates to digital technologies, many of the skills that one can learn through their graduate career (e.g. GIS, database management, remote sensing, data analysis, etc.) can be immediately applicable to other fields and types of employment.

What projects or research endeavors do you hope to pursue in the future?

I hope to continue the main threads of my current research moving forward: working on the best ways to reuse 3D digital artifact representations and participating in the development of best practices for the digital accessibility, publishing, and archiving of archaeological data. One form of this will hopefully come about through the development of platforms for the multi-use futures of 3D archaeological data, where digital data can be published in a stable and open way, but also be utilized for public interaction. I plan to continue my current research projects in Cyprus and with the Slovenian material, but hope to extend my collaborations to archaeologists and heritage professionals working in a variety of locations.