

Blurring the 'Line' between Anthropological and Classical Archaeology: An Interview with Dr. Mike Galaty

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Dr. Michael L. Galaty is currently Professor of Anthropology and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. He earned a Bachelor's of Arts with honors from Grinnell College in 1991, and received his Master's of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1994 and 1998. His research interests include prehistoric Greece and Albania, the origins of complex societies and early states, regional analysis and archaeometry with ceramics. Throughout his career, Dr. Galaty has conducted research that frequently crosses the interdisciplinary lines between anthropological and classical archaeology.

Hi Dr. Galaty. To begin, can you please give us an overview of your research interests and goals, and describe how both anthropological and classical archaeology have influenced your work?

As an undergraduate I took Greek and courses in classical archaeology and studied abroad in Greece, but I was drawn particularly to anthropological archaeology. I decided to attend graduate school in anthropology with a research focus on the rise of states in Greece. Little did I know that this was not commonly done! That said, and with the help of excellent mentors in both camps – Doug Price, Gary Feinman, John Bennet, Jack Davis – I have managed to straddle both worlds. I was lucky to get a job that allows me to teach anthropology but work in the Classical world. And I somehow manage to get to AIAs and SAAs (and sometimes AAAs) each year (heck, I even went to CAMWS once!). Most importantly, having access to the views and positions of both anthropologists and classical archaeologists has produced for me, I think, interesting insights as regards Mycenaean states and their position in a cross-cultural, global archaeology of archaic states, generally. This would not have been possible had I not worked in cross-disciplinary fashion.

Since starting my academic career I have had conversations with professors, other graduate students and even some undergraduates that give the sense that there is a line separating anthropological and classical archaeologists, despite the fact that both are trying to better understand the past. As someone whose research crosses disciplinary lines, do you believe that such a line exists?

This is less and less true, particularly within certain circles (i.e. amongst the younger generation). IEMA is

proof of that. Over the years I have developed great respect for my classically-trained friends and colleagues, and I have witnessed the divide between disciplines begin to close. We are not so different anymore. Sometimes we share the same goals, but have different primary means of getting there; e.g. some classical archaeologists emphasize historical data and see archaeology as being primarily an historical endeavor. I see myself as a scientist. But both approaches can be integrated when people are smart about research design. Things are no different in other parts of the world – Mesoamerica or China, for instance – where documentary and epigraphic data are also available. These lines are largely illusory and when drawn are often drawn for political reasons that have little to do with good archaeological research.

Why do you think this is? Is there a theoretical or methodological conflict, a problem in communication, or is this a generational issue based on differences from the past being passed down within the disciplines? What can today's students do to counter this?

First and foremost, students need to be committed passionately to what they are doing. If you want to be an anthropologist and study ancient Greece, don't let anyone tell you it can't be done. A handful of us have been very successful living in both worlds. Good archaeology is good archaeology no matter where it is done. That said, working in Greece can be difficult, in terms of permitting and one's association with the American School. But the "classical" world is much wider than Greece. That is why I have spent the bulk of my career working in Albania. Students should not be afraid to address "classical" research questions in parts of the world other than Greece and Italy.

Based on your experience, are there any special theoretical or methodological considerations that need to be addressed when conducting cross-disciplinary research?

Doing cross-disciplinary research requires proficiency in both fields, to the extent that is possible. Students who are serious about working in the classical world need to know their history and at least something about the classical languages. Likewise, they must understand anthropological-archaeological method and theory. You can't do both part way. You have to do both fully and to the best of your ability. You also need to know your audience. Writing a grant proposal for the NSF is different than writing for the NEH. I have gotten money from both, but I had to be "bilingual" to do so. It does not matter where your project is located or what time period you are interested in. What matters is how you describe the nature and goals of your research. Writing a paper for *American Anthropologist* is different than writing for the *American Journal of Archaeology*. One also needs to be capable of a certain degree of theoretical and methodological "empathy" since we sometimes speak different languages and use different techniques, despite having similar goals.

Do you have any advice for students who are doing, or plan to do, cross-disciplinary research now or in the future?

The best thing one can do is network across disciplines. There are excellent people in both camps who can provide guidance and opportunities. Get into the field and do fieldwork. This is absolutely essential. The Great Divide between disciplines is not bridged between the pages of text books, it is bridged person by person, one by one by one, over beers and around campfires. Finally, cultivate a methodological specialization that is needed always and everywhere, in Greece and throughout the world. Having such a specialization (in addition to being a good, well-rounded scholar) makes one indispensable, but also helps open doors and provides cross-disciplinary points of contact. For me it was archaeological chemistry and ceramic petrography, but there are all kinds of specializations that are desperately needed in Greece, and elsewhere in the classical world.

Where do you see cross-disciplinary research in ten years time? Where would you like to see it? How long do you think it would take, and how difficult would it be, to establish greater collaboration between anthropological and classical archaeologists?

In 1999, in the introduction to *Rethinking Mycenaean Palaces*, Bill Parkinson and I wrote: "The great divide is

...a loss to both anthropologists and Aegean prehistorians. If this gap between the fields is to be closed, we must each take an active role in closing it" (p. 22). In the second edition to that book, published in 2007, we wrote: "[In 1999] we bemoaned the disciplinary rift between classically and anthropologically trained archaeologists... Today, that rift seems much narrower and less permanent than it once did. ... In terms of shared method and theory, the divide has been nearly closed." (p. 2). Cross-disciplinary research occurs and is valued when individual scholars decide to work together across fields and traditions. For this to happen, though, archaeologists from both camps must integrate, get to know each other (ideally working together in the field), share ideas and perspectives, and conference and publish together. These kinds of relationship can happen now, to the advantage of anthropology and classical studies, if we, and students in particular, decide to form them. *Chronika* is a prime example.