

NEWS

The Institute of Archaeology Research Themes

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Two workshops were held at the Institute on 30th May and 2nd June 2014, to discuss the research strengths of the department, understand how they should be communicated and agree on a strategy to develop them more fully in the future. All research and teaching staff were invited to attend these events, which consisted of a general session introducing and concluding each day, and a number of thematic sessions aimed at exploring specific research areas in their multiple dimensions. These sessions proved successful in encouraging thought-provoking and innovative ideas to come to the forefront, and in highlighting opportunities for collaboration. As a result of the lively and stimulating discussions and of the preparatory work that had been undertaken beforehand, eight over-arching research themes emerged: 1) Landscape, Environment and Climate; 2) Artefact Production and Exchange; 3) Ritual, Religion and Cosmology; 4) Archaeological Theory and History of Archaeology; 5) Human Evolution; 6) Food Production and Consumption; 7) Cities, States and Empires; and 8) Critical Cultural Heritage. These are briefly defined below; while described individually, there is certainly valuable overlapping and cross pollination between several of them.

Landscape, Environment and Climate:

This theme explores the relationship between humans and their environment, encompassing aspects of geoarchaeology, zooarchaeology, archaeobotany and GIS/spatial modelling.

Artefact Production and Exchange: This focuses on how tools and other archaeological materials are produced, including lithics, ceramics, metals, glass and textiles.

Ritual, Religion and Cosmology: This relatively new theme builds on the rich datasets being explored by Institute staff (e.g. Stonehenge, Rapa Nui, etc.) and will draw on a wide range of archaeological expertise.

Archaeological Theory and History of Archaeology: While under the same umbrella, these two themes are distinctive in their approaches. Archaeological Theory encompasses theoretical reflections ranging from Darwinian archaeology to public archaeology. History of Archaeology focuses instead more strongly on the study of the economic, social and political contexts of archaeology in the past.

Human Evolution: Grounded in evolutionary archaeology, this theme brings together a broad pool of interests within archaeology and anthropology, such as human cognition, life history, dental anatomy, bioarchaeology, gene/culture co-evolution, evolutionary psychology and human genetics.

Food Production and Consumption: Addressing issues of domestication and

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palaeodemography, this theme is concerned with ideas developed in a number of archaeological fields, including zooarchaeology, archaeobotany, geoarchaeology and human genetics.

Cities, States and Empires: While still in the initial stages of development, 'Cities, States and Empires' aims to examine aspects of urbanism, colonialism, social hierarchy, and collapse/emergence theory.

Critical Cultural Heritage: This theme presents a new way of exploring and understanding cultural heritage, through a more critical and analytical eye, and includes aspects of conservation, ethics, public archaeology and digital heritage.


In the years to come, these themes will guide the research and progress at the Institute of Archaeology. They will aid in the development of new courses, conferences and publications, and will help to build more robust links with external organisations and universities across Europe and beyond. These areas of research also promise to facilitate inter-departmental collaborations, as they are not restricted solely to the domain of archaeology, but rather are far-reaching, and will encourage interaction with several other disciplines.

Future issues of *Archaeology International* will feature a regular report on how these eight broad themes are developing.

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