

Archaeology International

Research Update

The Archaeo-Sexism exhibition at UCL

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How to cite: Hawkins, K. and Frearson, C. 'The Archaeo-Sexism exhibition at UCL'. *Archaeology International*, 2023, 26 (1), pp. 224–30 • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/AI.26.1.17>

Published: 30 December 2023

Peer review:

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Abstract

The Archaéo-Sexism exhibition comprises 24 posters, primarily illustrated personal testimonies of sexism in archaeological fieldwork, with the aim of promoting diversity and equality through better ethics in the world of research. The testimonies relating to sexist behaviours were collected by the *Paye ta Truelle* project in 2017, as part of the reaction to the global expansion of the #MeToo movement. A selection of these testimonies were illustrated in conjunction with the Archéo-Ethique Association to create a travelling exhibition. Funding from UCL in 2022 enabled the printing of this French-language exhibition for English-speaking audiences and the opportunity to use the exhibition to promote discussions around sexist behaviours in UK-based academic and commercial archaeological practice.

Keywords: archaeology, fieldwork, harassment, sexism

Introduction

Survivor testimonies have always been a key element in raising awareness of sexist behaviours. The UK-based hashtag #EveryDaySexism, founded by Laura Bates in 2012, collated over 100,000 reports (Melville

et al. 2019) and in 2015 #EveryDigSexism (Cobb and Poucher 2015) refined this approach to document more explicitly sexist behaviours within UK archaeology. Following the global rise of the #MeToo phenomenon in 2017, the sharing of experiences across archaeological practice increased exponentially and many more accounts were set up, such as Paye ta Truelle to collect French and Belgian accounts and #utgrävningpågå (#excavationinprogress) with the same objective in Sweden. Being able to use these testimonies to bring about change, without endangering individuals or running the risk of legal proceedings proved challenging; one of the creative outcomes to get around these issues was the Archaéo-Sexism exhibition.

The Archaéo-Sexism exhibition comprises 24 posters, primarily illustrated personal testimonies of sexism in archaeological fieldwork, taken from the Paye ta Truelle and #EveryDigSexism accounts. The testimonies cover a broad spectrum of behaviours, from unwanted comments on an individual's appearance, the gendered nature of fieldwork and sexism around pregnancy and working parenthood, through to sexual harassment and physical assault. Part of the strength of the exhibition is the visual representation of just how vast an array of behaviours are encompassed in the testimonies. The use of a small number of artists provides continuity throughout the exhibition; all the testimonies are simply illustrated with a short commentary describing the particular incident. Alongside the testimonies are posters highlighting the intersectionality of discriminations including, but not limited to, homophobia, transphobia and racism. Information on how to fight these discriminations is also provided, as is a link to the Chantier-Éthique guidelines (Ethical Fieldwork, designed by the Paye ta Truelle project and the Archéo-Éthique Association), as a way of identifying projects committed to fighting discriminations.

UCL (n.d.) is committed to tackling sexist behaviours across the institution, and the Archaéo-Sexism exhibition is a valuable asset in that campaign. The exhibition covers many environments in which sexist behaviours can occur, with a particular emphasis on fieldwork settings. The UCL Institute of Archaeology (IoA) has always maintained a strong commitment to fieldwork with undergraduate degree courses now accredited with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA); undergraduate students on these degree pathways are therefore eligible

for student membership of CifA. Archaeology South-East, the commercial archaeology division of the Institute of Archaeology, is a CifA-registered organisation, and therefore has a responsibility to ensure all work undertaken is in line with the CifA code of conduct. The Dignity at UCL policy and associated training¹ has meant that archaeologists at UCL have a range of protections and reporting tools. Students engaged in fieldwork are likewise protected by the IoA code of conduct for fieldwork. So why bring in the *Archaéo-Sexism* exhibition?

Despite academic advances in thought and interpretation, it has been repeatedly shown that gendered and intersectional inequalities still persist within archaeological practice (Ulm et al. 2013; Aitchison et al. 2014; Cobb and Croucher 2020; Aitchison et al. 2021; Overholtzer and Jalbert 2021) – inequalities that foster and enable the sexist behaviours illustrated by the *Archaéo-Sexism* exhibition. Within the UK, workplace surveys by the archaeology branch of the Prospect trade union (Andrew et al. 2020), the volunteer-run BAJR Respect Campaign (Hawkins and Rees 2020) and the latest Profiling the Profession survey (Aitchison et al. 2021) have all shown similar trends in harassment across the profession in the UK. The European-wide Anti-Harassment, Assault, Bullying and Intimidation (HABI) 2021 survey has recently provided baseline quantitative data on the experiences of archaeologists from 49 different nationalities (Coltofean-Arizancu et al. 2023). This revealed that 82 per cent of respondents had experienced a form of HABI, that it disproportionately impacts younger archaeologists and that there was no correlation between an awareness of a code of conduct and rates of HABI reported. Despite UCLs measures, there is a high likelihood that IoA students will encounter such behaviours at some point in their archaeological studies or, for those that continue in the sector, in their archaeological careers. The exhibition is displayed in a way that offers individuals the choice to view (rather than mandatory attendance) and students are given the option to discuss and explore the content. Links are also provided to support from both UCL and external organisations. An awareness is, however, not enough. Although bystander training developed by the Student Union as part of their Zero Tolerance project has been optional for students at UCL since 2015, mandatory bystander training for IoA students has recently been trialled and it is hoped the combination



Figure 1 The exhibition on display at UCL (South Cloisters)

of this, and a greater understanding of unacceptable behaviours will prove an empowering combination.

The Archaéo-Sexism exhibition was first shown at UCL in July 2022, located in the South Cloisters where it was available for public viewing (Figure 1), before being moved to the IoA where it was shown in July 2022 (Figure 2) and again in March 2023. While the physical posters were on display, an online version was also available via individuals UCL user logins, so that students and staff based remotely could also access the exhibition. Online access was an important consideration for the staff of Archaeology South-East, many of whom are located across south-east and eastern England and therefore unable to attend a physical viewing in London.

Bringing the Archaéo-Sexism exhibition to UCL was the result of a collaboration between UCL and colleagues on the continent, academic and commercial staff and students. The IoA is not the only department at UCL that engages in fieldwork, and the next step is to use the



Figure 2 Students discussing the exhibition at the Institute of Archaeology

exhibition to facilitate discussion with these UCL colleagues, to explore what we can do individually and collectively. The UCL funding of the exhibition has also benefitted the wider UK archaeological workforce; the exhibition was shown at the Cifa annual conference (2023) to encourage these same conversations with the aim of improving awareness, training and policies across the wider archaeology and heritage sector.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Paye ta Truelle and the Archeo-Éthique Association for their agreement and support in enabling an English-language version of the exhibition to be produced. Cat Rees of BAJR Respect, IoA and ASE staff also provided much encouragement and advice, particularly Emily Johnson with regard to creating the online version.

Funding

A joint application by the authors to the UCL Dean's Strategic Fund (2022) enabled the printing of an English-language version of the exhibition. Additional funding for part-translation was provided by the Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CifA). Additional costs have been covered by the authors.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this article. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

Note

1 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/dignity-ucl>.

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