

## L.S. Klejn and R.G. Collingwood on History, Archaeology, and Detection

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### **Abstract**

*Collingwood is well-known for noting, in The Idea of History, similarities between the work of the historian and the work of the detective. In this essay I argue that it is not the historian who is similar to the detective but rather the archaeologist.*

*In presenting this argument I make use of the work of the Russian archaeologist L.S. Klejn, who has explored in detail both the similarities between archaeology and detection and the differences between archaeology and history.*

*Part of the interest in comparing the views of Klejn and Collingwood is that they are from radically different backgrounds. Collingwood's views were formed in pre-war Britain whereas Klejn's views were formed in the post-war Soviet Union. How they conceive of their work on theory is also different: Klejn sees himself not as a philosopher but as an archaeological theorist; whereas Collingwood saw himself as a philosopher of history. Yet there is common ground in their approaches and in some of their conclusions. It will be argued that Klejn is more accurate than Collingwood in comparing the archaeologist – rather than the historian – to the detective; but, once this concession is made, their views of history can then be reconciled.*

### **Keywords**

R.G. Collingwood, Leo S. Klejn, history, archaeology, forensic science

### **Introduction**

My intention in this essay is to argue, against Collingwood, that it is not the historian's work that is similar to the detective's but the archaeologist's, and that this has repercussions with regard to how we should see the disciplinary boundary between history and archaeology.

In order to make this case I shall make use of the work of the Russian archaeological theorist Leo S. Klejn. Klejn has written extensively on the comparison between archaeology and detection, and in the following section I provide an exposition of his views on the subject matter, task and methodology of archaeology. In this exposition the similarities that Klejn sees between the work of the archaeologist and the work of the detective will be made apparent.

There then follows an exposition of Collingwood's views on the subject matter, task and methodology of history, followed by an exposition of the essential points that Collingwood makes in 'Who Killed John Doe?' This is the fictional vignette in *The Idea of History* in which Collingwood compares the historian to the detective. I point to three flaws in the comparison that Collingwood makes: 1. He misrepresents the work of the detective in relation to the work of the judiciary. 2. He misrepresents the work of the historian in relation to the judiciary. 3. He is mistaken in comparing the historian's work to that of the detective. It is rather the archaeologist's work that is comparable to detection.

The focus of this essay is on 3. (1. and 2. are criticisms that are separate and self-contained.)

Having criticised Collingwood's detection comparison, I then look at how Collingwood distinguished between archaeology and history. Curiously, this seems not to have been a question to which he devoted much attention. However, away from 'John Doe', there are indications that Collingwood's view of archaeology is in large part compatible with Klejn's.

I discuss at a more general level the comparison of Klejn's work in archaeological theory with Collingwood's work in the philosophy of history; and, finally, I conclude with the suggestion that Klejn's work on archaeology and detection may be of value in the continuation of Collingwood's project of discovering the distinguishing absolute presuppositions of different disciplines of inquiry.

### **Klejn on the Subject Matter, Task and Methodology of Archaeology**

Klejn is concerned that the disciplinary boundary between archaeology and history should be maintained and it is for this reason that he attaches such importance to the similarity between archaeology and detection. He maintains that it is this similarity that distinguishes archaeology from history. This is a matter of great importance to Klejn, for under the Soviet Union, under the officially approved philosophy of historical materialism, archaeology was almost eliminated as a distinct discipline. Thus, "I developed my entire work in theoretical archaeology to working out a system of theories and methods which could grant strictness and objectivity of archaeological cognition, in order that archaeology would be able to resist the intentions to serve the political situation of the moment."<sup>1</sup>

Klejn argues that the study of archaeology under the Soviet Union teaches us that "[v]iewing archaeology as a subspecies of history leads not only to the idea that no specifically archaeological theory is needed but also to disdain for specifically archaeological methods: critical appraisal of sources, strict principles in typological and cartographic methods, criteria of proofs of links of continuity, and the like."<sup>2</sup> He argues that the archaeologist belongs to a distinct discipline, separate from, but adjoining the discipline of history.

Klejn claims that archaeology's relation to history may be summarised by the motto: "archaeology is the handmaiden of history."<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Klejn I put it to him that many contemporary western archaeological theorists would strongly resist such a characterisation. He replied as follows:

Yes, I have of course, encountered this concern. Archaeologists are afraid to lose the prestige of their profession. They want to participate in solving the great problems of sociology and history directly. But we must not be misled by metaphors. Yes, archaeology serves history – but it is not dominated by it. The Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko called archaeology the 'mother of history'. Handmaiden or mother? The connotations are different but the sense is the same.<sup>4</sup>

Klejn does not believe that archaeology and history exist in a relationship of inferiority or of superiority to each other. Nonetheless, he wishes to draw a horizontal line between them rather than a vertical line. Throughout much of the Soviet period it was believed that the line to be drawn between archaeology and history – if there was a line to be drawn at all – was a vertical line, to be drawn at some point along a timeline, with archaeology equating to

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<sup>1</sup> L.S. Klejn, *Metaarchaeology* (supplementary edition of *Acta Archaeologica*) (Munsgaard: Blackwell, 2001), 7.

<sup>2</sup> L.S. Klejn, *Soviet Archaeology: Trends, Schools, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66.

<sup>3</sup> This description of archaeology is often misattributed. It seems to have first been used by the nineteenth century archaeologist John Collingwood Bruce (1805–92).

<sup>4</sup> Klejn in Leach, 'In Conversation with Leo S. Klejn', *Archaeological Dialogues* 22 (2015), 173.

prehistory. It was believed that the past could be read from material sources in much the same way that it could be read from a book.

Klejn argues that archaeology is distinguished from history by its subject matter, by its task, and by its methodology – and in all three of these areas it is closer to detection, and to forensic science, than to history.

## SUBJECT MATTER

The archaeologist deals primarily with unwritten material artefacts. As such the archaeologist typically has no “channel of written communication”<sup>5</sup> with the past. He must perforce deal with a two-fold break from his subject matter. What does Klejn mean by this?

Without preliminary remaking, information fixed in things is not suitable for scholarly use. One must recode it and do it twice. First one must translate it from what is metaphorically called the ‘language of things’ to any of the natural languages; to describe things and their relations. At this stage one has to use special terminology much more than in history. Then it is necessary, by comparing acquired evidence with others, to establish what events and processes of the past have been reflected in the material sources described. Only then does the information obtained reach the form demanded by the historical discipline.<sup>6</sup>

In other words the archaeologist (1) describes the artefacts that are found and (2) describes their origin and how they came to be where they were found (taking into account processes of decay – processes that the historian does not have to consider); and only then does he relay his conclusions to the historian. By contrast, although the historian might mention, for example, the quality of workmanship found in a collection of leather artefacts from a medieval site, he will not have to deal with these artefacts as they come out of the ground (covered in mud or encrusted with dirt); the historian will only deal with them indirectly via the archaeological reports of these finds. In this way, the historian is only once removed from his subject matter.

At this point the objection might be raised that the archaeologist also deals with written artefacts, for example, in the form of inscriptions. Klejn readily admits this;<sup>7</sup> but he argues that even then the archaeologist is focussed on trying to answer different questions than the historian. The archaeologist attempts to answer the questions of ‘who what where when whence whither how and why,’<sup>8</sup> but of these questions the question of ‘why?’ is subordinate to the others and will only be asked in order to answer one of the other (primary) questions. In answering these primary questions the archaeologist must pay attention, at first hand, to the material characteristics of the artefacts. By contrast, the historian is primarily interested in the question of ‘why?’ and any other question will serve this question. In answering this question the historian need not pay attention to the material characteristics of the artefacts at first hand.

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<sup>5</sup> L.S. Klejn, *Metaarchaeology* 2001, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Note that Klejn includes numismatics, textology and toponomics within the same group as archaeology and forensic science. Leach, ‘In Conversation with Leo S. Klejn’, 174.

<sup>8</sup> ‘State the question as a question. With nominative sentences a theme is set but not a problem. A problem is set only when it is formulated by a question. The real question begins with “who”, “what”, “where”, “when”, “whence”, “whither”, “how”, and “why”.’ – one of the aphorisms, ‘The Commandments’, on the wall of Klejn’s classroom, quoted in Leach *A Russian Perspective on Theoretical Archaeology: the life and work of Leo S. Klejn* (Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2015), 144.

Klejn expands upon this difference between archaeology and history – *and the similarity between archaeology and detection* – as follows:

Admittedly there is a ‘why?’ element within the work of the archaeologist, but it is ultimately subordinate to the question of ‘what happened?’ For instance, the archaeologist may ask ‘why is this artefact fragmented in this way?’ or ‘why was this pot put into the pit?’ yet not ‘why did this culture move in this direction?’. Likewise, the detective may ask ‘why did this purse appear in this pocket?’ but not: ‘why did this man become a thief?’<sup>9</sup>

The similarity between archaeology and detection in this respect is confirmed when we turn to handbooks of forensic science. Thus, for example, according to Broeders, the detective is primarily concerned with the questions “who, what, where, when, what with, in what way, and, to a lesser extent, why.”<sup>10</sup>

## TASK

The fundamental task of the archaeologist is the reconstruction of events: “everything in archaeology can be reduced to reconstruction.”<sup>11</sup> Once a hypothetical reconstruction is achieved it is handed to the historian for further processing. Likewise, the fundamental task of the detective is also the reconstruction of events. But once the detective has established, for example, who fired the gun, further questions of why the gun was fired are not asked by the detective, though they may be discussed by a jury.

Klejn likes to say that the archaeologist is a detective who has arrived at a crime scene a thousand years too late. “Archaeology is not history armed with a spade but a detective story in which the investigator has arrived at the scene a thousand years late.”<sup>12</sup> His point is not that there is a cut-off point on a time line, after which the archaeologist is no longer interested in an event, but that the tasks of the archaeologist and the detective are fundamentally the same – the reconstruction of events, “to restore the events and processes of the past by their material traces and fragmented remains.”<sup>13</sup> It is only the purpose to which their work is then put that differs. One serves the historian, and the other serves a court of law.

The main task of archaeology is “to convert information from the language of things into the language of history, the language of historical phenomena, events, and processes.”<sup>14</sup> (Klejn warns that although the language itself may be polysemantic, the language of things is much more so.) Once this conversion is achieved, as well as can be, the interpretation of the archaeological site and the archaeological artefacts will be made available for the historian to read in the form of an archaeological report or a book-length summary. Thus, although conceptually different, archaeology and history have very close ‘business relations’:

Archaeology is unconditionally connected with history, but it is connected by business relations, as a partner. In other areas they are sometimes not only dissimilar but not even akin.

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<sup>9</sup> Klejn in Leach, ‘In Conversation with Leo S. Klejn’, 173. The detective may consult histories, in the form of oral testimonies, in the course of his investigations, but again this will ultimately be for the sake of the question ‘what happened?’ and not ‘why?’.

<sup>10</sup> A.P.A. Broeders, ‘Principles of Forensic Identification Science’ in T. Newburn, T. Williamson, A. Wright (eds.), *Handbook of Criminal Investigation*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 308.

<sup>11</sup> L.S. Klejn, *Metaarchaeology*, 38.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The Commandments’ in Leach *A Russian Perspective on Theoretical Archaeology*, 144.

<sup>13</sup> L.S. Klejn, *Metaarchaeology*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

They are of a different methodological nature. While history is an individualising discipline, and, taking into account the individuality of human creatures, history is a humanity, archaeology is not. This is a fundamental difference.<sup>15</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

In order to overcome the first break from the original event, the archaeologist takes an interest in what is typical and often makes use of typologies – much more so than the historian. Indeed, it is crucial for the archaeologist to generalise about what is typical. In this respect also, the archaeologist and the detective make use of the same methodology. Whereas the detective is typically more interested in the classification of bullets and blood types, and the archaeologist is typically more interested in the classification of pottery and coins, in both cases the investigator “seeks objects belonging to the same type or objects of a similar kind and looks for similar assemblages that are already known or other ones that are better preserved. Thus he provides an interpretation by close comparison.”<sup>16</sup>

Klejn maintains that the archaeologist is in the same position as the detective who notices a cigarette stub at the scene of a crime:

Has the stub been left by the criminal, victim, witness or a chance passer-by who saw nothing? Was the cigarette smoked during the moment and at the spot of the event of interest for the investigation, or had an ashtray been knocked and the butt fallen out before the event? The list of possible correspondences between the things and events is not limitless – it is quite apparent the cigarette was not smoked by a horse belonging to the criminal or by the investigator’s dog – but nevertheless the list is very large, and it is difficult to grant its completeness.<sup>17</sup>

According to Klejn, “history strives to understand unique events and heroes, whereas archaeology is obsessed with generalisation, typification, and its central concept is type”<sup>18</sup> The same is true of forensic science: it is concerned with establishing that which is typical.

No wonder then that archaeology and forensic science have had a productive influence on each other. The import of archaeological methodology into forensic science is well known. Less well-known is the occasional involvement of detectives investigating archaeological fakes: as examples of the latter Klejn cites the investigation of the Glozel fake and the Saitapharnes tiara.<sup>19</sup> (In the case of the recording of fingerprints, we have an example of a technique that was inspired by the trace of a potter’s fingers on an archaeological artefact, that was then taken up by the police, and that in recent years has returned to archaeology.<sup>20</sup>)

However, the practice of archaeology and detection is not just a matter of unimaginatively following the correct techniques; a flash of inspiration is as useful in archaeology and detection as it is in history, and an awareness of one’s own actions is invaluable. Thus archaeology “has its own system of concepts, its own theory, and its own principles,”<sup>21</sup> and the same applies to forensic science. But, they are different from those of the historian.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.: 39.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: 35.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: 40.

<sup>20</sup> See H. Faulds, ‘On the Skin-Furrows of the Hand’, *Nature*, 22 (1880), 605.

<sup>21</sup> L.S. Klejn, *Metaarchaeology*, 41.

In summary, archaeology, according to Klejn, is a positivistic discipline focussed on the reconstruction of events, in which the question of ‘why?’ is secondary to the question of ‘what happened?’. History, by contrast, is a humanistic discipline primarily focused on the question of ‘why?’. However, Klejn says less about the character of history than archaeology. To examine the character of history, we now turn to Collingwood.

### **Collingwood on the Subject Matter, Task and Methodology of History**

Collingwood’s definitive view of history was to have been published as *The Principles of History*, a book which he did not live to finish and which was only published, in an unfinished form, in 1999. His views on history have thus mainly become known from *The Idea of History* published posthumously in 1946. However, as Collingwood scholars continually point out, *The Idea of History* was not published in the form that Collingwood intended. It was patched together from various sources by his pupil and executor T.M. Knox. Partly owing to Knox’s editing, many early readers of *The Idea of History* assumed that Collingwood’s intention in this work was to provide historians with a prescriptive methodology.<sup>22</sup>

It is now generally acknowledged that this is a misreading and that Collingwood’s writings on history should rather be read in the light of his theory of presuppositions as laid out in *An Essay on Metaphysics* (1940). Interpreted in this way Collingwood can be seen as attempting to disentangle the historian’s implicit presuppositions and to arrange them in logical order. The deepest presuppositions, ‘absolute presuppositions’ in Collingwood’s vocabulary, are those that are essential to the pursuit of history and give it its distinctive character, even though they may not be explicitly known to those who rely on them. In attempting to reveal the historian’s presuppositions Collingwood’s aim is not primarily to provide a methodology but nonetheless, it is clear from his *Autobiography* that Collingwood did not believe that his inquiries were without repercussions outside of metaphysics.

Although Collingwood did not complete his project of revealing the historian’s presuppositions according to the scheme laid out in *An Essay on Metaphysics*, he left us in no doubt that history, in his view, is a humanistic discipline. For, in Collingwood’s words, “all history is the history of thought.”<sup>23</sup>

It is the rational nature of the historian’s subject matter that gives it its distinctive methodology and which affects the nature of the historian’s task. Thus, for example, the historian’s sense of causation is quite different from the physicist’s or the engineer’s and is not derived from them.<sup>24</sup> When the historian claims to have discovered the cause of an agent’s action he is claiming to have reconstructed the rationale of that agent’s action, which crucially includes the premise of that agent’s internal underlying argument. It is this sense of cause that the historian attempts to retrieve in order to answer the question of ‘why?’. And, indeed, Collingwood suggests that history is uninformative unless it provides an answer to the question of ‘why?’.<sup>25</sup>

In short, the historian aims to show that an action is the result of a practical inference from particular epistemic premises. The historian must not accept evidence at face value but rather,

<sup>22</sup> E.g., P. Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 129-30.

<sup>23</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 110; *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 215, 317; *The Principles of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67, 98, 100.

<sup>24</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 292.

<sup>25</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 214.

in order to make sense of the sometimes *prima facie* bizarre or alien actions of agents in different societies, he must imaginatively attempt to rationalise them by exploiting the universality of reason.

However, Collingwood was not solely concerned with the question of how it is possible to understand the mind of another person; he was also concerned with the question of how we are able to reconstruct a series of past events.

### Who Killed John Doe?

The best-known part of *The Idea of History* devoted to the latter problem is the illustrative detective story ‘Who Killed John Doe?’. This is to be found in the final part of *The Idea of History*, the Epilegomena, and also in the place in which Collingwood intended it to be read, the first chapter of his *The Principles of History*. In *The Principles of History* it is perhaps clearer than in *The Idea of History* that ‘Who Killed John Doe?’ is primarily concerned with the problem of how to reconstruct a series of past events. Elsewhere, as explained above, Collingwood is primarily concerned with the logical form of a successful historical explanation.

There is a subtle but important difference between these two questions. Yet ultimately – as I hope will be seen – although Collingwood’s concern in ‘Who Killed John Doe?’ is with the problem of how to reconstruct a series of past events, his analysis runs into problems because he does not adequately separate this concern from his more usual concern for the logical form of a successful historical explanation.

Here is the problem that faces Collingwood’s detective:

When John Doe was found, early one Sunday morning, lying across his desk with a dagger through his back, no one expected that the question who did it would be settled by means of testimony. It was not likely that anyone saw the murder being done. It was even less likely that someone in the murderer’s confidence would give him away. It was least likely of all that the murderer would walk into the village police-station and denounce himself. In spite of this, the public demanded that he should be brought to justice, and the police had hopes of doing it; though the only clue was a little fresh paint on the handle of the dagger, like the fresh green paint on the iron gate between John Doe’s garden and the rector’s.<sup>26</sup>

The clues to solving the mystery are provided by the fact that the rector was seen, by his daughter’s boyfriend, crossing his garden at midnight, wearing gloves. Furthermore, in the rectory dustbin is found “a lot of ashes, mostly from writing paper, but including some from leather, probably a pair of gloves. The wet paint on John Doe’s garden gate – he had painted it himself that day, after tea – explained why the gloves might have been destroyed; and among the ashes were metal buttons bearing the name of a famous glove-maker in Oxford Street whom the rector always patronised.”<sup>27</sup>

Before the revelation of these clues we are told that “John Doe was a blackmailer. For years he had been blackmailing the rector, threatening to publish the facts about a certain youthful escapade of his dead wife.”<sup>28</sup> However, at what stage this fact becomes known to the police is unclear. It is likely that this fact only became known *after* the police had begun to have strong suspicions that the rector committed the crime. In fact, Collingwood tells us that

<sup>26</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 266; *The Principles of History*, 21–22.

<sup>27</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 267–68; *The Principles of History*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 267; *The Principles of History*, 22.

the rector committed suicide when he believed he would be arrested, so perhaps the blackmail was only uncovered during the inquest into the rector's death, a separate case.

I shall return to 'Who Killed John Doe?' very shortly, but first I shall briefly focus on a claim that Collingwood makes in the immediate wake of the story.

The methods of criminal detection are not at every point identical with those of scientific history, because, their ultimate purpose is not the same. A criminal court has in its hands the life and liberty of a citizen, and in a country where the citizen is regarded as having rights the court is therefore bound to do something and do it quickly.<sup>29</sup>

By contrast:

the historian is under no obligation to make up his mind within any stated time. Nothing matters to him except that his decision, when he reaches it, shall be right: which means, for him, that it shall follow inevitably from the evidence.<sup>30</sup>

In making this claim, the first mistake that Collingwood makes is to conflate the work of the detective with the work of the judiciary. It is not within the remit of the detective to pronounce upon the guilt or the innocence of his suspects.

The second mistake is the claim that "the historian is under no obligation to make up his mind within any stated time." The historian is not immune to the pressure of deadlines. Even if he has no other deadline he will have to face the deadline of his own mortality. But whereas the historian has the luxury of suggestion, the criminal court does not. The judge's decision does not take the form of a suggestion. It is therefore more important that a court's decision should be right "beyond reasonable doubt" (rather than that the decision of the historian should attain this level of near certainty). If, in court, no decision can be reached beyond reasonable doubt, the verdict must be "not guilty" or, under some judicial systems, "not proven". It is the court – and not the historian – that must deal in near certainties.

But, to return now to the story of John Doe, Collingwood's third mistake is to compare the historian to the detective. It would be more accurate to compare the archaeologist to the detective. For, as Collingwood stresses throughout his work on explanations in history – and as explained in the previous section – the historian's explanation is focused on the question of 'why?' whereas in the story of John Doe the detective's focus is primarily on 'what happened?'. The question of 'why?' might be relevant to the investigation but answering it is only important insofar as it helps the detective to answer the question of 'what happened?' (and 'who did it?'). In this respect, Collingwood's detective story is thus better illustrative of Klejn's description of archaeology than of Collingwood's description of history.

(Perhaps – incidentally – the historian, as opposed to the archaeologist, is more similar to the judiciary than the archaeologist in that, for example, members of a jury may, with good reason, continue to deliberate as to *why* a particular crime was committed, even though the basic series of events has been well established. However, that is not to deny the point made previously, that there are, also, significant distinctions between the historian and the judiciary.)

None of the above casts doubt on Collingwood's analysis of historical explanation, nor on his defence of the autonomy of history, but rather it suggests a refinement to it. Of course the same person can be both an archaeologist and historian – Collingwood himself is one such

<sup>29</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 268.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



example, and there are many others – but conceptually archaeology and history remain distinct disciplines.

It is curious that Collingwood seems to have paid little attention to the distinction between archaeology and history, but we must remember that he left his philosophy of history unfinished. In Klejn's case, his attention to the issue is understandable, for there was a period in the history of the Soviet Union when, under the weight of state-approved historical materialism, the autonomy of archaeology as an academic discipline was under serious threat of extinction. It was in the face of this threat that Klejn, and others, in the Soviet Union asked themselves exactly what it was about archaeology that made it distinctive from history.

Yet in the West the comparison between archaeology and detection was commonplace in the detective fiction of the 1920s and '30s, and this may have inspired Collingwood. The first known reference to Collingwood comparing himself to a detective comes in a report of a talk given by Collingwood in 1928:

Mr. R.G. Collingwood of Pembroke College, Oxford, gave a lantern lecture to members of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society at the Philosophical Hall in Leeds yesterday, on 'Recent progress in our knowledge of Hadrian's Wall'. He and Mr. Gerald Simpson have been conducting research in recent years on the Roman Wall, research which Mr. Collingwood described as similar to the unravelling of a mystery by Sherlock Holmes. 'I myself am Dr. Watson,' said Mr. Collingwood, and throughout the lecture he kept up the pretence of a crime mystery. (The Yorkshire Post 19 Dec. 1928)

Unfortunately it is unclear from this report whether he was making this comparison as a historian or an archaeologist.

In *The Idea of History* Collingwood refers to archaeology as "the methodology of history"<sup>31</sup> – a description to which Klejn would object. However, elsewhere Collingwood and Klejn seem to be in agreement on the nature of archaeology. Thus, for example, in unpublished manuscripts Collingwood uses 'critical history' as a synonym for archaeology; and he describes it as follows:

Critical history classifies its sources into groups, and then subdivides these groups, and then subdivides these groups, framing rules for the manipulation of the various subdivisions. Taken as a whole, this technique is an abstract or classificatory science, which has no general name, unless archaeology is used for it, and is then subdivided into numerous departmental sciences.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, Collingwood's description in *The Principles of History* of the collection and classification of material that occurs in archaeology as an "essential preliminary"<sup>33</sup> to the writing of history is also in accordance with Klejn's conception of archaeology. Furthermore, Collingwood refers to a book-length example in his own work of exclusively archaeological material. This is his *Archaeology of Roman Britain* (1930). In the preface he describes this as

<sup>31</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 491. However: "There is another methodology which is pure methodology.... This pure methodology is the philosophy of history; a science dealing with the universal and necessary characteristics of all historical thinking whatever, and differentiating history from other forms of thought", *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>32</sup> Unpublished MS. quoted by J. van der Dussen in his *History as a Science: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 213.

<sup>33</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History*, 492.

“strictly . . . a handbook of archaeology, not a history.”<sup>34</sup> This is a book, little read by Collingwood scholars and now superseded by subsequent archaeological research, that consists entirely of non-overlapping schemes of classification: of coins, pottery, settlement plans, plans of villas, etc. (It may not be coincidental that this was the work on which Collingwood was engaged immediately before he set to work on *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933), in which he described non-overlapping systems of scientific classification in detail and contrasted them to systems of overlapping philosophical classification.)

This emphasis on scientific classification and typology, as described by Klejn – and as practiced by Collingwood in *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* – simply does not accord priority to the question of ‘why?’. Classification is, above all, a practice pursued for the sake of the question ‘what happened?’. By contrast, a history, albeit a history informed by archaeology – such as Collingwood’s *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (1936)<sup>35</sup> – accords priority to the question of ‘why?’.

The detective in Collingwood’s detective story concerns himself above all, like the archaeologist, with the question of ‘what happened?’ and ‘who did it?’. The question of ‘why?’ is secondary.

### **The Philosophy of History and Archaeological Theory**

In comparing the work of Collingwood and Klejn it should be noted that Klejn is not a philosopher and he has no wish to be taken for a philosopher. In his view, philosophical discussions do not lead anywhere – for any conclusions that are reached cannot be verified or falsified by empirical evidence. Klejn is both a historian and an archaeologist, and within archaeology he has a particular interest in archaeological theory (or theoretical archaeology – the two terms are synonymous).

Archaeological theory is a branch of archaeology that has developed since Collingwood’s time. However, it is not difficult to imagine Collingwood being sympathetic to its development. For, whatever their differences, archaeological theorists are agreed that self-awareness is necessary within archaeological practice. It is necessary in order that the correct questions are asked, questions that will force the raw archaeological data to yield new information. The importance of self-awareness is fully apparent in the first of Collingwood’s principles of “historical studies”:<sup>36</sup>

Never to dig “either a five-thousand-pound site or a five-shilling trench without being certain that you can satisfy an inquirer who asks you ‘What are you doing this piece of work for?’”<sup>37</sup>

Collingwood did not claim that this principle was his own original idea, but he did claim that throughout the 1920s he was one of the few, including Mortimer Wheeler, who propagated this idea, against stiff resistance. The same principle is in fact found at a much earlier date in the work of the archaeologist Flinders Petrie:

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<sup>34</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* (London: Methuen, 1930), vi.

<sup>35</sup> *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* is credited to Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres but: “This work is not a work of collaboration. It consists of two independent studies of two distinct, though interlocking subjects.” Collingwood and Myres, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), v. Collingwood wrote the part that deals with Roman Britain.

<sup>36</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 120.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 126.

The old saying that a man finds what he is looking for in a subject is too true; or, if he has not enough insight to ensure finding what he looks for, it is at least sadly true that he does not find anything he does not look for.<sup>38</sup>

Collingwood, writing in 1939, believed that this principle had become deeply rooted. He wrote that of “the future of this principle among scholars I am . . . not anxious.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Collingwood had no need to be anxious; for since his time, despite pockets of resistance, the principle has in fact become even more deeply rooted. Archaeological theory, which has developed from the late 1960s and early 1970s – from, and for the sake of, the practice of archaeology – can be seen as the flower that has grown from this principle.

Nevertheless, although Collingwood advocated a principle that is at the foundation of archaeological theory, we must be careful not to anachronistically view Collingwood as an archaeological theorist. Not only was the term not in use in Collingwood’s day, but for Collingwood the discovery of the foundations of history and archaeology was primarily an exercise of metaphysical interest (albeit with strong but recessive repercussions for history and archaeology). Herein lies a difference with contemporary archaeological theory, which is – or aspires to be – entirely empirically driven. Klejn is vehemently emphatic on this subject, dismissing the idea that theory might itself constitute an autonomous *second-order* discipline as “sheer twaddle.”<sup>40</sup> In his view theory begins and ends with practice. He argues that a theory, if successful, will do nothing less than formulate a successful methodology that will be of use in empirical research.

In summary, the major difference between Collingwood and Klejn is that, although Collingwood stressed the need for the metaphysician to have a thorough knowledge of the discipline under review, and although he believed that his work would have recessive repercussions within history and archaeology, Collingwood – as a theorist – wrote primarily for philosophers; by contrast Klejn makes use of theory primarily in the hope of influencing other archaeologists.

Yet, having noted this important difference, it must be said that there are also similarities between Klejn and Collingwood. Like Collingwood, Klejn believes that the theorist must begin by studying the methodologies of what are commonly agreed to be the best examples of practice within the field. By making these practices explicit the theorist hopes to contribute to future practice. There is, Klejn admits, an element of circularity to this conception of theory but it is, he believes, a virtuous circularity.<sup>41</sup> Readers of Collingwood’s *Essay on Metaphysics* (1940) will here immediately notice a similarity to Collingwood’s theory of presupposition.

Therefore, although Collingwood and Klejn ultimately have different aims, it is nevertheless, I believe, a constructive exercise to compare their conclusions.

## Conclusion

It has here been argued, against Collingwood, that it is the archaeologist who is similar to the detective and not the historian. However, this revision does not have repercussions for Collingwood’s conclusions concerning the fundamental character of history. It does not cast doubt on Collingwood’s argument that history is a fundamentally humanistic discipline,

<sup>38</sup> Flinders Petrie, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 49.

<sup>39</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, 126-7.

<sup>40</sup> Klejn, quoted in Leach *A Russian Perspective on Theoretical Archaeology*, 127.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

concerned, above all, with answering the question ‘why?’. It can still be maintained that a satisfactory answer to this question will involve the recovery of the relevant premise of the agent’s reasoning. As such, history *is* a humanistic discipline; but it is fed by an essentially positivist discipline. And, in the other direction, archaeology may be fed by history, for included among the archaeologist’s varied motivations there may be questions that have arisen within the discipline of history.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, as previously mentioned, the same person may be both a historian and an archaeologist whilst yet the two disciplines remain conceptually distinct.

However, while I have not cast doubt on Collingwood’s argument that history is a humanistic discipline, I hope to have at least shown the importance of continuing Collingwood’s work of discovering absolute presuppositions and, thereby, distinguishing the boundary between history and archaeology. Until this is done, debates over whether these disciplines are essentially humanistic or positivistic are likely to remain blighted by misunderstanding.

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<sup>42</sup> See Leach, ‘In Conversation with Leo S. Klejn’, 174.