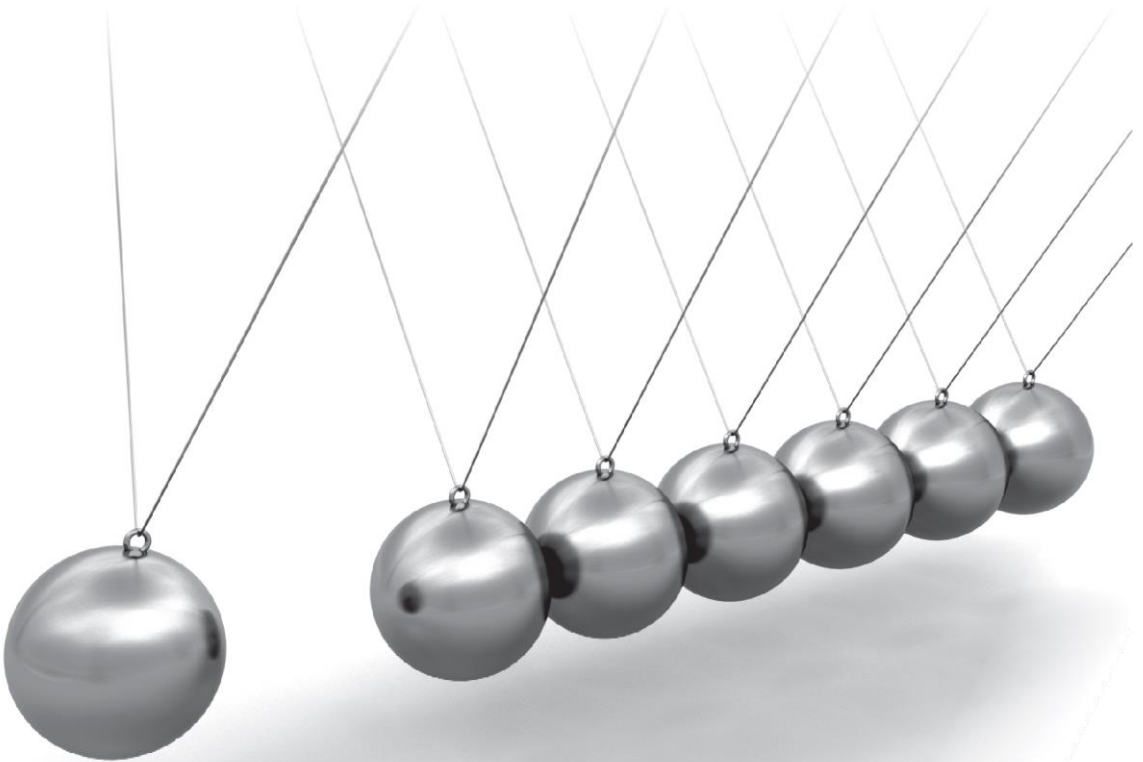


HUMANS AND SOCIETY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Archaeology of Crisis

Edited by Staša Babić



1838

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Archaeology (in Times) of Crisis

Aleksandar Palavestra*

CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Abstract: The text aims to discuss the crisis of confidence in archaeology and its possible causes. Confidence in a scientific discipline is based upon the social and individual confidence in the authority of science in general, in some particular discipline (e.g. archaeology), in scientific institutions, but also in prominent scientists and their public statements. Furthermore, the institutions and esteemed scholars who communicate with the public are the main pillars of confidence in a particular science. The crisis of confidence in archaeology is induced by current global anti scientific tendencies, but also by the media and the political support to ideologically preferred non-scientific statements promulgating the “better past” or supporting the interests of dubious investors. This is not an innocent, fringe phenomenon, but a dangerous process that may have devastating consequences for archaeology – the discipline that may offer solutions to numerous challenging questions of the modern world.

Keywords: science, anti scientific trends, archaeology, pseudoarchaeology

In his essay “The Power of Falsehood” Umberto Eco states that the untrue stories are above all stories, and that stories, like myths, are always convincing. However, he states that there exists a procedure for verifying such untrue stories, which entails a slow, collective, and public effort of the community: “Thanks to the human trust in the work of this community we are able to, at least partially confidently, state that *Constitutum Constantini*¹ was a forgery, that the Earth evolves around the Sun and that St. Thomas at least knew that it was a sphere. Finally, the confession that our history has been moved by many stories that we now recognize as un-

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1 Donation of Constantine, an 8th century forgery, according to which the Emperor Constantine allegedly relinquished the authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope. In 15th century, Lorenzo Valla established that the document was forged.

true should make us careful, able to constantly reconsider even the stories we today hold to be true, for the criterion of prudence of a community is based upon constant caution, due to the fallibility of our knowledge” (Eko, 2015, pp. 297–298).

The community Eco speaks about may be understood as the scientific community in the broadest sense, since science is, among other things, based upon researchers’ scepticism and the constant reevaluation of our knowledge. However, we witness daily the loud and proud disregard of facts known in the Middle Ages – that the Earth is a sphere. Is the conviction that Earth is flat, so widespread even in the 21st century, the result of common sense, critical scepticism, and scientific reconsiderations? According to Michael Shermer, scepticism in science is *not* the refutation of the possibility of acquiring real knowledge, but a quest for scientific truth balancing between orthodoxy and heresy, or in other words, between the existing state of science and the blind acceptance of any new idea. He emphasizes that some scientific precepts are highly probable, to the extent that they may even be considered *scientific truths*. The example he gives is the fact that the heliocentric system is not severely challenged any more, nor the fact that Earth is not a flat plaque supported on the backs of four elephants (Shermer, 2002). However, we see that in spite of all astronomical proofs and the development of astronautics over the last two centuries, the number of those who doubt this is not negligible (though elephants are not mentioned any more, becoming an endangered species even in the pseudoscientific explanations). “Flat-Earthers” believe that the Earth is a flat plane, negating the scientific worldview, the synergy of many disparate scientific fields, general and specific scientific theories, specific methodologies, as well as a huge body of verifiable evidence. “Common sense” is not the most reliable scientific methodology, since scientific facts often do not correspond to our natural or intuitive expectations (Wolpert, 1992, after Škorić, 2010, p. 489). In other words, without the scientific knowledge on gravity and the size of Earth one might wonder why the Bačka plain is so flat if the Earth is spheric, or how come we have not fallen off the globular planet. According to Wolpert, common sense provides us only with raw material for scientific thinking that further requires scientific methodology, but also depends upon social and cultural circumstances (Wolpert, 1992, after Škorić 2010, p. 490).

Science is by definition a set of logical and empirical methods providing systematic observations of a phenomenon with the aim of understanding it. We consider that we have reached the understanding when we formulate the corresponding theory explaining the functioning of the phenomenon in question, the patterns it follows, or why it appears

in its particular form (Carroll, 2003, p. 399). The inverse understanding of science, based upon erroneous logic and inference, disregard of theory, method and evidence was once labelled the “Cargo Cult Science”² by Richard Feynman, the famous physicist and Nobel-prize winner. The followers of this cult in the Pacific Islands during the World War II saw the American cargo planes delivering supplies to the troops, so they built a makeshift airport and runways, and even obtained wooden headphones, in the hope that this magic will induce an airplane to land and bring them “cargo” as well. No airplane landed. Feynman compared this cult to pseudoscience that imitates science only in form, but lacks the substance of theory, methodology, and verifiable evidence. In other words, planes do not land there either (Feynman, 1974).

However, we have been witnessing a strong tide of anti scientific trends over the last decades highly visible in the public thanks to modern communication technologies, in particular social networks. In other words, the results of scientific disciplines are disputed according to the principles of Cargo Cult Science, theoretical and methodological foundations of statements are disregarded, as well as the evidence. More broadly, this is a part of anti rational tendencies, described by Umberto Eco as Ur-Fascism, and characterized by a dogmatic mode of thinking, irrationality, faith in eternal, hidden, and forgotten knowledge, conspiracy theories, and identifying disagreement with betrayal (Eco, 1995).

The so-called “science wars” of the end of the 20th century, fought about the epistemological problems of relativism and the social-constructivist critique of science, belonging to the wider context of sociology of science, will not be discussed here.³ Quite the contrary, the topic is the crisis of confidence in the basic scientific principles, principally in archaeology. It is paradoxical that today, in a time of scientific and technological advance there is a severe, wide-spread, and extremely loud distrust in the basic scientific achievements. The idea of a flat Earth, however mindless it may seem, even as a pseudoscientific interpretation, is a clear symptom of an extremely worrying social phenomenon. Mistrust in science spreads to less frivolous and much more dangerous areas than this. The anti-vaccine movement, based upon conspiracy theories, non-scientific methodology, inaccurate data, intuitive and anecdotal inferences, led to an increase in the spread of fatal infectious diseases that had almost been eliminated. The light-handed denial

2 Cargo Cult, significantly simplified by Feynman for this purpose, is a revitalization cult originating in Melanesia in the 20th century, as a result of European colonial oppression and limited access to the Western products and goods (Ember et al., 2007, p. 474).

3 More on this in: Škorić, 2010, pp. 485–546.

of scientific indicators that climate change and global warming are the results of reckless and selfish human actions and irresponsibility may lead to catastrophic consequences for the whole planet (Kabat, 2017; Škorić, 2010, p. 508).

The causes for the mistrust in science may be various (e. g. religious, cultural, ideological, nationalistic, financial, interest-driven), but all anti scientific movements share the specific trait of generating their own “knowledge”, sharply opposed to the authority of the scientific community (Gavande, 2016). This particular knowledge is not questioned by science deniers, nor is it critically evaluated by the standard scientific methodology, and every justified scientific critique is dismissed as enemies’ conspiracy. In conspiracy theories there is no place for complexities and doubts, and the world is sharply divided into “us” and “them”, “good” and “evil”. In this respect, the discourse of conspiracy theory is closely related to populism, since disagreements with science are reduced to the issue of “the people against the elite”, or in this instance “the people against the alienated and corrupt scientific community” (Cook & Lewandowsky, 2020, pp. 3, 6–8). It is therefore not surprising that in Serbia the proponents of pseudohistory and pseudoarchaeology label criticism at their expense from the scientific community as “mercenaries of the Vatican, the Freemasonry, or Vienna-Berlin”, always without any solid argument (Radić, 2016, pp. 175, 187–188).⁴ Alternative “truths” against the currently accepted scientific consensus, are formed according to the principles of Cargo Cult Science, i. e. pseudoscience.

The crisis of confidence in science is thus a wider problem, affecting many disciplines, including archaeology. The relationship between science and pseudoscience in archaeology has many epistemological aspects, some of them already discussed elsewhere (see e.g. Kosso, 2006; Fagan, 2006; Milosavljević & Palavestra, 2017). The focus here is on the question: is there a crisis of confidence in archaeology and what are its causes? The confidence in a particular scientific discipline is based upon the social and individual confidence in the authority of science in general, in specific disciplines (such as archaeology), as well as in scientific institutions, prominent scholars, and their public statements. Moreover, the institutions and esteemed scholars, communicating with the public, are the very pillars of confidence in a particular scientific discipline.

4 Or, in the inspired words of one of the proponents of “alternative archaeology”: “Jesuit-Bolshevik chains or the Roman Empire, shackling the Slavs, with precisely appointed controllers and conductors of well-synchronized anti-Serbian and anti-Slavic orchestras.” <https://facebookreportermonitor.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/2-text-zavrnsni-dokument-mali.pdf>, pp. 15–23.

However, each of these components – from an individual scholar with a certain kind of authority⁵, to an “official” institution, to the individual discipline and the wider scientific community, is likely to come under attacks from proponents of anti science, leading to the demise of individual and social trust, and ultimately their loss.

When discussing the legitimacy of science’s authority, it is extremely important to recognize the difference between various strands of anti sciences, or parasciences, as emphasized by Marko Škorić (Škorić, 2010, pp. 493–494). He cites Gerald Holton, who discriminates between “real” science (good, bad, and indifferent; old, new, or just emerging); pathological science; pseudoscience (astrology and the “science” of the paranormal); blatant silliness and superstition. In the case of the crisis of confidence in archaeology, Holton’s *pathological science* is particularly important. He builds upon an essay by the chemist and Nobel Prize winner Irving Langmuir, describing the cases of “sick” science, where the scholars in question were not consciously producing fraudulent results, but considered in full honesty that they were conducting real scientific research, believing in their own wrong results for reasons of various personal biases and prejudices, and not understanding how science really functions (Holton, 1993; 1994, pp. 264–265).

As stated above, the public gains confidence in a particular scientific discipline, archaeology included, on the grounds of the statements of esteemed individuals from credible scientific institutions. A layperson, without specific knowledge in archaeology, chemistry, or astrophysics, can hardly judge the veracity of particular disciplinary statements, their theoretical soundness and methodological rigor, or the appropriate treatment of pertinent evidence. The public instead gives their confidence to the scientific credibility granted by approved consensus to publicly registered and acknowledged institutions (academies, universities, institutes) and affiliated researchers. In principle, strict mechanisms are in place for the verification of scientists affiliated with particular institutions, such as appointment procedures, entailing a certain number of published works, subjected to double-blind peer review, independent control of results in international journals and at scientific conferences, etc. Accordingly, the public has good reasons to trust the statements of scholars affiliated with such institutions. The wish of some pseudoscientists to boast affiliations with respectably sounding institutions is therefore not unusual, although their “scientific” biographies and publication lists are often very hard to verify. Sometimes the title and affiliation refer to an entirely different field

5 On the various aspects of scientific authority: *de facto*, legitimate, executive, epistemic, and intellectual, see: Pruitt, 2011, pp. 3–38.

of science (e.g. a stomatologist with the title of doctor speaking of astrophysics), or is completely fabricated, seemingly obtained in a foreign institution the existence of which is impossible to establish (Palavestra, 2017, pp. 150–152; Milosavljević & Palavestra, 2017, pp. 843–845).⁶ Illustrative is the example of the symposium on the so-called “Vinča script” – *Signs of Civilization* – organized in 2004 in Novi Sad, by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and the little known Institute of Archaeology from Sebastopol, CA, USA. The vast majority of speakers at this conference were staunch proponents of the presumed “Vinča” or “Danube script”, but a number of archaeologists from credible scientific institutions also took part and, unfortunately, did not engage in the critique of pseudoscientific statements. Quite the contrary, their stance may be characterized in terms of Holton’s “pathological science”. The unfortunate result of the Novi Sad symposium is that from then on, the proponents of a pseudoscientific construction – the “Vinča script” – emphasize (without justification) that the Serbian Academy acknowledged their interpretation (Palavestra, 2017, pp. 158–160). This conference thus demonstrated the fragility of institutional credibility, which may unfortunately serve as a shield for pathological science and pseudoscience. Once the barrier is broken, the institutional protection from bad science is not operational any more, and in 2007 another conference was held in the premises of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, hosting a series of blatantly pseudohistoriographical presentations (Radić, 2016, pp. 127–131). Instances such as these severely jeopardize confidence in science in general, and particularly in the disciplines of history and archaeology.

The recognizable symptoms of pathological archaeology and pseudoarchaeology are the absence of explicit theoretical statements and scientific methodology, as well as disregard for evidence (Feder, 2001, pp. 30–31). Peter Kosso explains archaeological epistemology in a nutshell: “Theory, description of the past, requires evidence, both as motivation and subsequent testing. And evidence requires theory to make it meaningful and credible. This is the essential reciprocity” (Kosso, 2006, p. 13). At the same time, in archaeological interpretation, context is of crucial importance. In the words of Gareth Fagan: “The centrality of context to archaeological interpretation cannot be overstated. Indeed, the codified techniques of excavation exist primarily to establish as firmly as possible the context of

⁶ In this respect, characteristic are the numerous “academies of sciences” in the former USSR and today’s Russia, where by the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st some 120 academies existed, almost none of them deserving the label. Many of them issue degrees, even doctoral ones, both in pseudoscientific (astrology, UFOlogy) and proper scientific disciplines (theoretical physics, genetics) (Kruglyakov, 2002; Kurtz, 2002).

newly revealed evidence (...) To put it another way, context places limits on the scope of analysis and demands constant attention from the judicious interpreter” (Fagan, 2006, pp. 26, 27).

Let us now take a look at two archaeological statements. Both are written by authors with scientific titles, affiliated with verified scientific institutions, and both are published in scientific journals. The first author is an associate professor at the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, and the second is senior researcher (now retired) of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade.

1. “In the framework of the so-called ‘animal turn’, animals may be observed as human companions, not only as resources for breeding, hunting, or exhibiting the exotic. They are also more than good to eat (resource) and good to think (totem), and the osteological remains of animals at archaeological sites should be interpreted accordingly. (...) In this text, I adopt the post-positivistic approach to evidence, based upon the philosophy of critical realism and the awareness of the processes of knowledge production. This means that an independent reality exists, but we may be critical towards our ability to comprehend it. Due to the constant possibility of mistake, post-positivists insist on the triangulation of multiple measurements and observations. (...) Here the starting point in the analysis of old evidence is the perspective offered by Robert Chapman and Alison Wylie in their book *Evidential Reasoning in Archaeology*. Understanding what we excavate or discover in a scientific process is marked by *learning to see* a particular situation, that is to observe it as a trait worthy of investigation and recording (*learning to see as*)” (Milosavljević, 2019, pp. 834, 836).

2. “The fact that on the stone figurines of women giving birth only the reproductive organ is represented in detail, eloquently speaks of the power they represent. It is also obvious that the largest and iconographically the most complex anthropomorphic figurine – the Great Mother – is the representation of the most important power among the figurines from Belica. It is beyond doubt that it is she who expresses the climax of the fertility cult – the moment of birth and the baby’s first nursing – the complete cycle of the renewal of living nature. It is beyond doubt that this figurine of lucky birth is the Neolithic representation of the primordial Mother. The figurines of phallos from Belica, the ithyphallic appearance of most of the figurines, including even the one representing the beginning of childbirth, indicate that the focus of the cultic activity documented at Belica was the divinised phallos. The figurines of virgins’ vulvae, most probably symbolizing non-fertilized soil, may be understood as the gift to this force, without which life cannot be regenerated. It is obvious that the two principles, male and female, are clearly stated by the appropriate representations in

the most durable natural material – stone, the apex of the cultic activity” (Stojić, 2011, pp. 342–343).

In the first example, Monika Milosavljević very carefully explicates the wider theoretical framework, as well as the methodology used, expressly directed towards the analysis of the evidence and archaeological context in question. More precisely, the whole text is a meticulous discussion on the modes in which context can be deduced from old evidence on animal remains in medieval graves and the possibilities of its interpretation. In the second example, Milorad Stojić does just the opposite – he gives no theoretical reference nor methodology underlying his conclusions. It remains obscure how the interpretation was reached postulating “Primordial Mother”, “virgin’s vulva”, and “divinized phallos.” The clichés of the 19th century anthropological ideas on Mother Goddess and the fertility cult are hinted at, but even these are not explicated, nor is there any relevant reference to previous work. The context of the objects is described summarily, so one can learn that it was in fact a chance find of a large number of stone and bone figurines placed in a shallow pit, which was subsequently “analysed” (Stojić, 2011, pp. 341–342). In other words, the context is unknown. To make things worse, the subsequent microscopic analysis of the Belica figurines, as well as the control excavations on the spot, established that the artefacts were recent in origin, made by modern tools with high-speed rotation heads. In other words, the objects are not prehistoric, nor Neolithic, but modern and planted (Antonović & Perić, 2012). Stojić responded to these critiques, but did not succeed in refuting them, merely announcing new analyses, still unpublished (Stojić, 2013).⁷

It may safely be concluded that the first example is a part of a scientific text, equipped with all the necessary theoretical, methodological, and evidential apparatus, while the second one comes from a text representing a clear case of pathological science according to Holton’s criteria (in case the author did not know about the fraud), or pseudoscience (in case he willingly took part in fabricating evidence). This brings us to the question of how does the second text undermine confidence in archaeology?

In the eyes of the public, not necessarily informed about scientific methodology, both examples discussed above are equally valid archaeological texts, thanks to the affiliations and scientific titles of the authors. Furthermore, even after the detailed scientific critique published in a renowned archaeological journal, proving that the Belica artefacts are recent

⁷ The sensationalist announcements of pending analyses (in foreign laboratories), which are never published, is a standard *modus operandi* by Stojić (e.g. 2002), and is also common for pathological and pseudoscience in general (Milosavljević & Palavestra 2017, pp. 834–835).

forgeries, the laudable and sensationalistic media coverage of the “prehistoric” figurines continues. The author later published a lavish volume on the Belica “finds”, claiming among many bizarre statements that this site is the oldest cultic-astronomic Neolithic settlement and that among the figurines recovered even a human embryo can be seen, but only if observed through a magnifying optical instrument (Stojić, 2018). Encouraged by the “success” of this project, the author later published a similar book on the site Medvednjak, stating it was the spiritual centre of the proto-Starčevo and Vinča cultures, and analysing many artefacts, testifying according to him of the ancient beliefs and the art of the people living in harmony with nature, of their knowledge of calendars, astronomy, numerical signs, and so on (Stojić, 2020). It is worth noting that the objects discussed and interpreted by Stojić are again without any archaeological context and originate from private collections, or are chance finds. This time though, the authenticity of the artefacts was not scrutinized by independent analysis. Furthermore, in December 2020 and January 2021 the daily newspaper “Politika” published an extensive series of more than 20 articles on the objects from Medvednjak, with lavish illustrations. Both the newspaper series and the book follow the same interpretive matrix used in the case of the Belica figurines. It is not by chance that in all these instances the emphasis is put on *discovery*, since in the public image of archaeologists, it is often linked to the ultimate purpose of the discipline and the criterion of its authority (Pruitt, 2011; Ćosić, 2016, pp. 757–768).

Returning to the basic question: how do such texts undermine confidence in archaeology? The texts by Stojić and their resonance in the public offer an illustrative example. Let us imagine a reasonably well-educated reader of the daily “Politika” and the books published by Stojić, who learns from these texts about the spiritual centres of the Balkan Neolithic, the ancient religion and the Mother Goddess, even about the presumed proto-script and sublime art expressed in the finds from Belica and Medvednjak. Such a reader has no reason to doubt the interpretation published in peer-reviewed books, esteemed Serbian daily papers, penned by the senior researcher of the Institute of Archaeology. However, it has been firmly established that the objects from Belica are recent forgeries from unknown context. The Medvednjak finds come from an unknown context as well, and bearing in mind the Belica situation, the question may be reasonably raised of their authenticity too. Furthermore, even if they are authentic, the interpretations offered are not scientifically grounded, nor credible. The clearly explicated theory and method are missing, as well as the archaeological context and verifiable evidence, so they fall into the category of pathological science or pseudoscience. Thanks to aggressive propagan-

da and the lack of critical distancing on the part of the media, parascience is once more presented as genuine science and equated to scrupulously composed scientific work.

The public is thus led to the erroneous conclusion on the very basic aims of archaeology, its purpose, theory, method, and public responsibility. Instead of addressing fundamental issues, public attention is diverted towards sensational “discoveries” and free-style interpretation, not bound by scientific theory or methodology, even dealing with objects without any archaeological context. The result is the devastating conclusion that archaeology is a discipline that can be practiced by anyone, without any theoretical or methodological scruples, even without regard to scientific evidence and data. Interpretation is seen as an open form, imbued by antiquated half-knowledge, emphasizing buzzwords such as “the oldest”, “superb”, “treasure”, “unique discovery”, “unknown script”, “astronomical knowledges” and so on (Cvjetičanin, 2019, pp. 796–801). The vast majority of pseudoarchaeological and pseudohistorical statements in our region glorifies “the better past”⁸ by the mechanisms of imagined traditions, indicating the need to redefine national identity and the tendency to compensate for the hard realities of the present by invoking the “glorious past” (Manojlović & Mihajlović, 2016, p. 1062). In this respect, the pseudoarchaeological statements follow the general anti science trends and conspiracy theories. The situation is aggravated by the media, augmented by the Internet and social media with their limited control of contents and enormous outreach, securing high relevance, popularity, and the resulting symbolic capital and social influence (Manojlović & Mihajlović, 2016, p. 1065).

The anti science trends impact archaeology just like any other scientific discipline. Undoubtedly, the anti-vaccination movement or the rejection of the fact that global warming is the result of human activity, have more harmful consequences for the whole planet than the pseudoscientific statements about the divinized phallus found in Belica, or about Troy at the banks of the river Neretva. However, archaeology is still important and may be very useful in the modern world. In his book “Archaeology Matters: Action Archaeology in the Modern World”, the famous American archaeologist Jeremy Sabloff defines action archaeology as “involvement or engagement with the problems facing the modern world through archaeology”, and states that it “benefits communities struggling with socioeconomic, demographic, or environmental issues by

8 A thorough overview of this topic is offered in the book “Bolja prošlost”: Palavestra 2018; Jovanović 2018; Šuica 2018; Džino 2018a; Džino 2018b; Kuzmanović i Mihajlović 2018; Radić 2018.

providing insight and action plans to be used today and in the future” (Sabloff, 2008, p. 17). He further describes various examples of action archaeology, from the study of contemporary rubbish, ecological, and climatic problems faced by past populations, to very complex issues such as war, urbanization, or the collapse of civilizations (Sabloff, 2008, pp. 20, 34, 60–67, 69). According to Sabloff, archaeology’s mechanisms and deep diachronic insight may significantly contribute to identifying the warning signs, and “play a critical role in advising against such complacency and helping to devise measures that mitigate some of these harmful phenomena” (Pezzelli, 2015, pp. 76–77).

Unfortunately, the relevant institutions in Serbia seem not to recognize the potentials of archaeology, instead often offering their support to pseudoscience and pathological science (*sensu* Langmuir/Holton). In 2012, several associations, none of them an accredited scientific institution, organized the conference “At the Source of Culture and Science” with alarmingly pseudoscientific contents. The most prominent archaeological institutions (the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Philosophy – University of Belgrade, the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade, the Belgrade City Museum) publicly reacted with a joint statement, emphasizing that it was “a pseudoscientific conference, whose announced topics, problematics, and methodology has nothing in common with science.” The statement was not published in its integral form, the official media⁹ labelled the most relevant archaeological institutions as “part of the professional public”, and the Ministry of Culture explicitly supported this pseudoscientific gathering¹⁰. The voice of the scientific archaeological institutions is obviously ignored, not only in the public, but also in the centres of political power. Similarly, in the recent case of building a cable car into the walls of the Belgrade fortress, the decision-making bodies respected only the opinions in line with the interests of the authorities and dubious investors, in stark opposition to the abundantly elaborated critical reactions of the majority of the local and international scientific community (Cvjetićanin, 2019, pp. 803–804). This not only marginalizes the role of the professional archaeological community in Serbia, but also makes room for the ideological and political abuse of the past, blossoming on the grounds of unfounded pseudoscientific narratives (Babić, 2018, p. 146).

“The power of falsehood” and the crisis of confidence in archaeology are not benign marginal or funny fringe phenomena. Archaeology has

9 TANJUG.

10 <https://facebookreportermonitor.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/2-text-zavrsnidokument-mali.pdf>, p. 32.

found itself between the hammer and the anvil. The confidence in this discipline is eroded as a consequence of the general anti science trend, and also due to the media and the political support to the ideologically favoured non-scientific statements, fabricating a “better past”, or complying to the interests of dubious investors. The crisis of confidence is obvious when even the responsible ministries, followed by the media, equate the statements of the most reputable archaeological institutions in Serbia with pseudoscience performances, or when some archaeological institutions themselves choose to follow the criteria of the market or the media, abandoning the scientific ones. Under these conditions, it is necessary to get back to the basic scientific principles at the heart of the discipline of archaeology: *respect of theory, method, and evidence*. If this scientific obligation is not fulfilled, a very dangerous erosion will take place, marginalizing and neglecting archaeology – a discipline that may offer the solutions and answers to many challenging questions of the modern world. In the words of Adrian Currie, fully applicable to archaeology: “Answering these questions requires evidence and perspectives which overcome the inherent bias of our little sliver (of time): a long-term view into the deep past. History matters at least because knowledge of it is necessary for answering Big Questions” (Currie, 2019, p. 2).

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Александар Палавестра*¹¹

КРИЗА ПОВЕРЕЊА У АРХЕОЛОГИЈУ

Апстракт: Овај рад је усмерен на питање да ли постоји криза поверења у археологију, и ако постоји чиме је она изазвана? Поверење у неку научну дисциплину заснива се на друштвеном и индивидуалном поверењу у ауторитет науке уопште, у поједине специфичне дисциплине (рецимо археологија), у научне институције, али и у истакнуте научнике и њихове објављене исказе. Штавише, управо су институције и угледни научници, који комуницирају с широм јавношћу, основни стубови поверења у одређену научну дисципли-

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ну. Криза поверења у археологију изазвана је, с једне стране тренутним глобалним антинаучним трендом, а с друге стране због медијске и политичке подршке ненаучним исказима који идеолошки пожељно доказују „бољу прошлост“, или иду на руку интересима крупног капитала и сумњивих инвеститора. То није безазлена, маргинална појава, већ опасан процес који може имати погубне последице на археологију, дисциплину која би могла да понуди решења и одговоре на бројна изазовна питања савременог света.

Кључне речи: наука, антинаучни трендови, археологија, псеудоархеологија

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While writing the texts collected in this volume, the authors have been living through an extraordinary experience, coping with everyday tasks made more complex by the crisis we have been facing, and creating new habits necessary to navigate the new environment. Although exceptional from our point of view, our present experience is far from unique, and the human history is replete with turbulent periods of crisis, profoundly disrupting the habitual order.

The aim of this collection is therefore to investigate some of the situations of crisis in the past from the archaeological perspective, in a search for insights that may help us to better understand and cope with the present one. At the same time, the papers demonstrate some of the vast possibilities of archaeological investigation to contribute to our understanding of the world we live in, as well as of the past societies whose material traces we study.

