

TO EMBED OR NOT TO EMBED?: ARCHAEOLOGISTS, CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGERS AND THE UNITED STATES MILITARY

Recently the United States Senate has taken steps to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. According to Article 7, the United States is expected to take active measures during peacetime to establish military regulations to observe the Convention, including the establishment of services or specialized experts to provide advice on the management of objects and sites before, during, and after armed conflict. This has become a hot topic of conversation among archaeologists, raising a number of questions about the mechanisms of cultural heritage policy, particularly with regard to whether or not civilian experts should work within the US military as "embedded" specialists in times of armed conflict [\[1\]](#).

Anthropologists are currently embroiled in a public debate on the ethical implications of the Human Terrain System and the rewriting of the FM 3-24 counterinsurgency manual, about which the American Anthropological Association has publicly voiced its disapproval. Archaeologists opposed to collaboration with the military reiterate these same concerns, and critics in both fields argue that assisting armed forces in any capacity legitimizes the undesirable effects of military occupation. An embedded expert's relationship with the military could hinder communication with local counterparts, potentially arousing suspicion through the conveyance of imperialistic authority. Further difficulties in communication may arise if data is obscured or withheld for security reasons. Moreover, the heritage expert becomes politically affiliated with the homeland of the armed forces in which they are embedded and may encounter policies or mandates with which they do not agree. Finally, embedded civilian experts working in combat zones experience frustration and disappointment. The heritage manager is entirely dependent upon the armed forces for resources, transportation, housing, and security, and they must ultimately defer to a military commander, whose main concerns are the safety of soldiers and the success of the mission, to provide the last word on important decisions.

These concerns are entirely valid and the practice of embedding of archaeologists within the military has inherent negative implications. However, the missions of embedded anthropologists and embedded heritage specialists are quite different. For anthropologists working as a part of the Human Terrain System or similar program, the ultimate goal is to use ethnographic data and anthropological research to collect intelligence and counter enemy combatants. The protection of cultural heritage by the military lacks such defensive motivations although the military would benefit through the improved relations with local inhabitants.

In the end, the protection of cultural heritage is at stake, and one must weigh the consequences of inaction versus those of collaboration. The question of whether or not to embed cultural heritage experts in the military is simply an attempt to redress one facet of a much wider issue within the United States. With regard to policy and education in relation to domestic and international cultural heritage management policy, the US lags behind the rest of the world. Ratifying the 1954 Hague Convention is a step in the right direction, but the embedding of cultural heritage experts in military forces is not meant to be a quick and easy fix or a replacement for adequate training within the military.

The task now must be to develop professional protocols for those who may be asked to assist armed forces in combat zones, and to define the proper relationship between heritage professionals and the military in order to streamline their respective goals. Simultaneously, the military must develop an internal awareness of the issue and begin to develop a military cultural heritage management plan that can be applied to all branches of the armed forces. In doing so, the military can wean its dependency on civilian heritage professionals and become a full and equal partner in formulating coordinated efforts to effectively protect cultural heritage during times of armed conflict. The only way this can be accomplished is through open dialogue between cultural heritage managers on the ground, professional organizations, and the military, fostered by mutual understanding.

Further reading

AAA, Oct 2007: "AAA Executive Board Statement on the Human Terrain System Project".

<http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/Statement-on-HTS.cfm>

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Hamilakis, Y. 2003. "Iraq, stewardship and 'the record': An ethical crisis for archaeology." *Public Archaeologies* 3, 104-111.

Rothfield, L. 2008. *Antiquities Under Siege*. Lanham, MD : AltaMira Press.

Stone, P.G. and J.F. Bajjalay, eds. 2008. *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.

[1] The term "embedded" has never been clearly defined, though do to limited space this term will need to be clarified at another point in time. In this context I understand "embedded" as a civilian asked by a defense institution to work in a combat situation alongside armed forces.

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e-mail: aecuneo@bu.edu

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