'A masterpiece in political propaganda' and a futile exercise in archaeological blogging

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On the 11th of April, 2010, after a 28-hour journey home from a conference, I found an e-mail to me and my supervisors. Its author 'protest[ed my] words and alleged findings concerning the looting of the Cypriot Cultural heritage'; stated that it was 'very obvious' that I had 'never visited [the] North part of Cyprus' and that I was 'heavily under the Greek fic[t]ious propaganda'; asserted that my findings were 'fic[t]ious'; and informed me that, 'although [he] could not read [my] thesis', he 'strongly believe[d]' that it was 'also fic[t]ious and ha[d] no academic value' (Atun, 2010n). It was certainly fictitious insofar as it had not yet been written.

Having met the e-mail's author, Turkish Cypriot Near East University Prof. Ata Atun, in the north part of Cyprus (in Famagusta in 2007), I remembered that he was also a journalist, I searched for keywords from my paper and was horrified by what I found. I went on to challenge my accusers, reasoned with their publishers (unsuccessfully) and blogged the research paper and multiple defences. However, they had scored their point and moved on. On that occasion, at least, my archaeological blogging appears to have been the equivalent of boxing someone else's shadow. This chapter reviews that story.
Blogging as communication

In response to nationalist reactions in Cyprus to my earliest blogging, I quickly developed a habit of posting irregularly and writing in a disengaging style. It certainly reduced the nationalist reaction, but it may have prevented my work from developing a moderate audience as well. Even after I had augmented that blog with the texts of background notes and conference papers, and published 24 village surveys as associated photo blogs, I only received about twenty or thirty visitors a day in total.

When I launched the Conflict Antiquities blog, I experimented with blogging and micro-blogging news, but ended up focusing on deep investigations into intriguing, public interest cases – the Olympia museum robbery, Syrian civil war looting, the Gezi Park uprising (shared between Conflict Antiquities and Unfree Archaeology), and the Gaza “Apollo” case. I greatly improved the readability of my work, and the readership – to fifty or sixty visitors a day.

Paul Barford’s (2014) blog on Portable Antiquity Collecting and Heritage Issues has received one million site visits in five years. After five years, Conflict Antiquities – my most popular and most successful blog – will probably have got only one hundred thousand page views. Since Barford’s blog offers similarly international coverage of the same subject, it may provide an instructive comparison.

Heritage Issues is updated frequently (often, several times daily) with brief but combative notes and analyses of news; it has a wider geographical coverage overall, grounded in the study of metal detecting in the UK. Conflict Antiquities is updated irregularly (but, on average, twice weekly) with reports and investigations that are commonly thousands of words long – far longer than the average post length of the most popular blogs on news and politics (cf. Allsop, 2010); it has a narrower focus on zones of conflict and crisis.

Although Heritage Issues may have a naturally larger Anglophone core audience, based upon its retweets and site referrals, Conflict Antiquities has a wide appeal to audiences for information on organised crime and political violence. So, it appears that something in the
alchemy of frequency, length and style accounts for Barford’s achievement of a more than tenfold superiority in feeding and keeping public interest (through increased numbers of visitors and/or visits).

Blogging as research, blogging as engagement

Blogging has enabled me to share experiences and warnings that would have been much diluted and delayed by scholarly publishing (e.g. Hardy, 2007). It has demonstrably increased my readership and engagement with affected communities, and thereby improved the accuracy and detail of my research (Hardy, 2011c: 113-115; 2013b; for systematic analysis, see Garfield, 2000: 3; Moxley, 2001: 63). As a result of it, I have been quoted in the Weekly Standard (Eastland, 2010, regarding Hardy, 2010a), consulted by Bloomberg Businessweek (Silver, 2014a, regarding Hardy, 2013d; Silver, 2014b, regarding Hardy, 2014a) and the Daily Mail (Thornhill, Kisiel and Walters, 2014; Kisiel and Walters, 2014; cf. Hardy, 2014b), Jadaliyya (Barry-Born, 2014, regarding Hardy, 2013a) and other media and civil society organisations (privately).

However, the success of the community campaign against Nazi War Diggers – in which I was a more visible member of a much larger movement against an intrinsically problematic television programme, and which was not actually a campaign concerning my research as such – was exceptional in every sense. My research into state complicity in cultural property crime and illegal undercover police activity (Hardy, 2011: 201-215; 2014c; 2014d), which I have blogged in draft and postprint form (Hardy, 2009d; 2010a; 2010b; 2010p; 2011a; 2011b; 2012), and which I have summarised in Greek and Turkish (e.g. Hardy, 2010k; 2010l), has simply been ignored.

Journalists approached me about Nazi War Diggers. No-one (outside the case) approached me about the death of Stephanos Stephanou and, when I approached them, no-one considered it newsworthy. Indeed, the only news coverage of my work on that case was a libellous attack on me. So, I question whether blogging has significantly increased the social impact of my research. And perhaps the best evidence of
that is my futile attempt to defend myself from the attack on me for my investigation into the death of Stephanos Stephanou.

Myths and misrepresentations

On the 9th of April 2010, I discussed Cypriot Antiquities Rescue from the Turkish Deep State: the Rescue of Forgeries and the Death of Stephanos Stephanou at the World Archaeological Congress’s International Conference on Archaeology in Conflict in Vienna (Hardy, 2010a). The paper was based on a blog post on Death and Denial: Stephanos Stephanou and the Syriac Bible (Hardy, 2009d), which was based on information from a confidential informant, who had contacted me regarding a previous blog post on [the] Antiquities Trade, Turkey-Cyprus: [a] Syrian Orthodox Bible (Hardy, 2009a).

In the conference paper: I had described the deprivation of the ghettoised Turkish Cypriots, who were enclaved during the Cypriot civil war and who turned to ‘antiquities looting [as] a way of surviving’; explained the paramilitary takeover of the illicit trade, which was a source of personal enrichment and conflict funding; highlighted the assassination on the 6th of July 1996 of dissident Turkish Cypriot journalist Kutlu Adalı, who had reported on the looting of the Monastery of Saint Barnabas by the Civil Defence Organisation (Sivil Savunma Teşkilāti (SST)), which was an auxiliary of the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces Command (Kıbrıslı Türk Güvenlik Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı (GKK)), which was the successor organisation of the civil war paramilitary Turkish (Cypriot) Resistance Organisation (Türk Mukavemet Teşkilāti (TMT)) (Irkad, 2000; Kanlı, 2007a; Kanlı, 2007b); and explored the death on the 1st of November 2007 of a Greek Cypriot undercover antiquities police agent in Turkish Cypriot police custody.

In the session discussion, an unidentified Turkish Cypriot, who lived in Vienna, accused me of a litany of offences, including: denying Turkish Cypriot suffering; representing Turkish Cypriots as ‘animals’ and the ‘worst criminals in the world’; scapegoating them for looting, which they could not have committed precisely due to their containment in the enclaves; misrepresenting TMT as a paramilitary or deep state structure when it was
a ‘defence’ force; perpetuating the myth of the Turkish deep state (an ultranationalist para-state), which did not exist; and perpetuating the myth of the deep state murder of Kutlu Adali, whose death was the consequence of a clash between ‘Communists and Conservatives’.

Already concerned with precise language regarding such a sensitive case, I had written out my paper and read my text from the page, so there was no possibility that I had spontaneously used ambiguous or misleading words or phrases by mistake. The representation of my paper was so unreal and so provocative that I suspected that he was not a random member of the audience. Nonetheless, unable to expose any vested interest to the audience, I simply refuted his claims point by point.

Outside, I had a civil conversation with Turkish Embassy Counsellor (Botschaftsrat) Ufuk Ekici. Then I found that the Republic of Turkey’s Embassy in Vienna (ROTEIV, 2010) had left print-outs on Protection of the Cultural Heritage in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Since that document regarded destruction, whereas my paper concerned theft, it may have been a reaffirmation of their monitoring of my (other) research activities. After all, when I had been conducting fieldwork on destruction in northern Cyprus, plain-clothes police had: surveilled, doorstepped, and questioned me; had (albeit inattentively) searched my computer and documents; and had questioned my contacts and acquaintances, until I moved back to southern Cyprus to avoid putting anyone at further risk. Otherwise, since my research into destruction in southern Cyprus had actually documented violence against Turkish Cypriot cultural property that had been excluded from other scholarly studies and public education (Hardy, 2009b; 2009c, which I developed into Hardy, 2011: 152-168; 2013c), it may have been evidence of an oblivious local embassy’s last-minute reaction to my paper’s title or the Turkish Forum’s activism.

At the time, I almost – almost – welcomed the trouble-making intervention, because it made everyone forget my nervous presentation and it certainly eased introductions.
‘A political thriller’

Then I went home and found the e-mail that started this chapter. As well as an academic and a journalist, Atun was (or had been) an Adviser to the (nationalist) Democratic Party President Serdar Denktaş, and a Consultant to the (nationalist) National Unity Party government’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Democratic Party leader Rauf Denktaş’s presidency. I was not optimistic. Searching online for “Sam Hardy” and “Stephanos Stephanou” revealed that, the day after my presentation, a technically unnamed person had posted a purported summary of my paper and the incident (Anonymous, 2010). It was on the Turkish Forum, an international, not-for-profit organisation, which was established to influence public opinion by presenting ‘the realities of the world with regards to Turks’ (Turkish Forum, 2011), which had about 19,000 members (Akçam, 2007a). The day after that, Prof. Atun had published an article regarding that summary in newspapers across Europe. The day after that, the article had reached a strategic research centre in Western Asia. Within a week, it had reached my neighbourhood newspaper in north London (Atun, 2010a-m; 2010o-2010z). I began to track the spread of the article through its online publication (though since then, due to common practice in Turkish newspapers, some of these articles have had their address changed, and many have been taken offline), and to investigate the people who had been involved in the article’s production. I also began to draft an examination of it through blogging.

Kufi Seydali

The anonymous Turkish Forum posting revealed that the person who had commented on my paper was Mr. Kufi Seydali, who was (or had been) an Honorary Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the President of the Friends of the TRNC, a Representative of Turkish Cypriot Associations (Overseas), the President of the European Cyprus-Turkish Associations Congress, the President of the World Turkish-Cypriot Federation and the Vice-President of the World Cyprus-Turkish Associations Congress.
Moreover, Seydali was a Member of the Senior Advisory Board Committee of the Turkish Forum and Chairman of its Advisory Board Committee on Issues of Turkish Cyprus and Western Thrace. When a long-persecuted Turkish historian of the Armenian Genocide, Prof. Taner Akçam, discussed the international Turkish nationalist campaign against his research, he identified three of the elements of the ‘Deep State’, ‘military-bureaucratic complex’: the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA); Tall Armenian Tale, which is ‘one of the most popular Armenian Genocide denial sites’; and the Turkish Forum (Akçam and Schilling, 2007).

‘A masterpiece in political propaganda’

The texts of Anonymous’s and Atun’s attack(s) were so close as to be either simultaneously-authored articles or an English-language original and a Turkish-language translation (cf. Hardy, 2010e; 2010f). The attacks were not only unreal and provocative but self-contradictory – for example, Anonymous (2010) alleged that I had ‘creat[ed] a mythical Greek hero called Stephanos Stephanou, who was presented as an under-cover, Greek Cypriot police officer’ (Anonymous, 2010), while Seydali claimed that I had shown ‘signs of manipulation by Greek Cypriot under-cover agents of the type of [the implicitly real] Stephanou’ (Seydali, 2010).

It is unnecessary, and would be even more futile, to refute these allegations again, because they were made with a wilful disregard for witnessed, verifiable, documented truths in the first place. Still, it may be worthwhile to consider a few of the claims and their relationship to the truth, in order to expose the production and intention of the authors’ arguments.

All used sarcastic and emotive language, such as Seydali’s mocking of my work as a ‘political thriller’ (9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010), Seydali’s description of my work as ‘anything but academic [akademik olmaktan başka her şeye benziyordu]’ (Seydali, 9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010; paraphrased by Atun, 2010a-2010m; 2010o-2010z), and Atun’s description of me as someone
who was ‘silly, foolish or stupid [sersem]’, who ‘told lies without blushing [yalanları yüzü kızarmadan da söyleyen]’, in an attempt to undermine my carefully sourced investigation.

Seydali judged my work to be ‘a masterpiece [of] political propaganda using an international scientific forum to present the TRNC as an illegal and criminal entity [gerçekte uluslararası bilimsel bir forum kullanarak KKTC’yı yasadışı ve suçlu bir varlık gibi göstermek amacını güden politik propagandanın bir şaheseri]’ (9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010; paraphrased by Atun, 2010a-2010m; 2010o-2010z).

In fact, I (2010b) had specifically avoided directly or indirectly commenting upon the legality or status of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) [Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti (KKTC)]. Seydali positioned himself on the defensive; he presented me as the ‘attack[er]’, who had ‘unjust[ly]’ maligned TMT, ‘whose sole function was to defend the Turkish Cypriot community against Greek-Greek Cypriot attacks’ (9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010). Yet, for instance, on the 23rd of May 1962, TMT assassinated Turkish Cypriot Cumhuriyet journalists Ayhan Hikmet and Muzaffer Gürkan, because they had exposed TMT’s “false flag” (staged, provocative) bombings of Bayraktar Mosque and Ömeriye Mosque (An, 2005: 6; CyBC, 2006: 39-40); and, on the 11th of April 1965, TMT assassinated two trade unionists, Turkish Cypriot Derviş Ali Kavazoğlu and Greek Cypriot Costas Mishaoulis, because they were bicommunalists/pacifists (An, 2005: 6; Papadakis, 2003: 260).

Seydali accused me of ‘a veiled attack on the TMT and Turkish Cypriot State[,] which was equated to some mythical and indefinable entity called “The Turkish Deep State”, which was made responsible for all ills on Cyprus [Kıbrıs’ta yaşanmış tüm kötülüklerden sorumlu olduğunu iddia ettiği, tanımlanamayan ve hayali bir varlık olan “Derin Devlet”le eşleştirilmeeye çalıştığı TMT’yve Kıbrıs Türk Devletine üstü kapak bir saldırı yapmış bu kişi]’ (9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010; paraphrased by Atun, 2010a-2010m; 2010o-2010z). In fact, I (2010b) had explicitly categorised the ‘plunderers’ as ‘Turkish and Turkish Cypriot nationalist gangs, which form[ed] a Turkish deep state, which operate[d] outside and beyond Turkish state control’. Seydali asked rhetorically: ‘How is it possible... that a small community imprisoned into

Blogging Archaeology
3% of Cyprus and beleaguered by the Greek army and Greek Cypriot armed elements, and under UN observation, could do such damage to the cultural heritage of Cyprus?' (9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010). ‘How is it possible that the Turkish Cypriots, who were confined in 3% of the island, were able to loot all of the island's historic sites [nasıl olur da adanın yüzü üçüne sıkıştırılmış Kıbrıslı Türkler adanın tümündeki eski eserleri yağmalayabilir[di]]? ’ (Seydali, 9th April 2010, paraphrased by Atun, 2010a-2010m; 2010o-2010z).

I had said that the illicit antiquities trade was ‘primarily’ structured around poor Turkish Cypriots’ subsistence digging and rich Greek Cypriots’ collecting (2010b). I had explained precisely how that trade was possible. According to then Greek Cypriot antiquities director Vassos Karageorghis, the Greek Cypriot administration had secretly allowed Greek Cypriot collectors to purchase illicit antiquities from Turkish Cypriot enclaves (1999: 17), and he had used a UNESCO vehicle to do so with government money (2007: 102-103). Since then, I have blogged sample studies of archaeological excavations and antiquities collections from the civil war (2010p; 2011a; 2011b; 2012), which corroborate that interpretation. (Indeed, one peer-reviewer of that data (Hardy, 2014c) considered it to be a ‘polemical’ indictment of Greek Cypriot archaeologists, rather than the Turkish Cypriot community.) Needless to say, that research blogging has elicited no response.

Intriguingly, Seydali noted that ‘Stephanou was visited by UN officers and Doctors [sic]’ (9th April 2010, paraphrased by Anonymous, 2010). I (2010b) had not mentioned the repeated autopsies under UN supervision and the UN has not acknowledged access to Stephanou before his death, only ‘representations’ on his (family’s) behalf (Christou, 2007) – so, evidently, Seydali had known the Stephanou case very well before I presented it. Ironically, Seydali’s intervention at the conference may have been one of the few tangible products of my research blogging.
Atun’s (2010a-2010m; 2010o-2010z) article concluded with a rallying call:

Now the time for us to be organised has come. We must tell our own truths to the world, and lay out in front of them Cyprus’s realities.

Sam Hardy’s e-mail address is “[deleted]” and his thesis supervisor Prof. [deleted]’s e-mail address is “[deleted]”. Please deliver your protests to these addresses and state that Sam Hardy’s comments with regard to the Turkish Cypriots did not reflect the truths.

[Artık organize olmamızın zamanı gelmiştir. Bizler de dünyaya kendi doğrularımızı anlatabilmeli ve onların önüne Kıbrıs’ın gerçeklerini sermeliyiz.

Sam Hardy’nin e-mail adresi “[silinmiş]” ve tez hocası Prof. [silinmiş]’un e-mail adresi “[silinmiş]” dir. Lütfen bu adreslere protestolarınızı iletin ve Sam Hardy’ın Kıbrıslı Türkler ile ilgili söylediklerinin doğruları yansıtmadığını belirtin.]

The only protest that my supervisor and/or I received was his own.

A futile exercise in archaeological blogging

Initially, I commented under the articles to make specific points and/or to share links to the text of my paper on my blog (e.g. Hardy, 2010c; 2010d), so that readers could judge my work for themselves. I blogged a string of English-language and Turkish-language defences and demands for a retraction and an apology (Hardy, 2010e-2010j; 2010n); but it made no identifiable difference. Only my very first defence is in my doctoral blog’s top 100 entry/exit pages. And that’s 63rd: TRNC Representative Kufi Seydali: A ‘Masterpiece in Political Propaganda’? Avrupa Gazete (2010) removed Atun’s article from their website. Açık Gazete (2010) refused to expose themselves to accusations of censorship, but offered a right of reply. However, exhausted and fearful
that I would highlight and prolong the attack, I did not submit a reply. None of the other publishers replied to my (2010m) appeal.

While I am not under the level of scrutiny, nor under the intensity of harassment, nor in the kind of physical danger that Prof. Akçam (2007a) is – thugs have ‘tried to break up [his] meeting[s]’ and have ‘physically attacked’ him – I suspect that the intention and the mechanism of the attacks on me are the same as the intention and the mechanism of the attacks on him. Akçam (2007a) and his employer have been sent ‘harassing e-mails’. He has been accused of being a ‘propagandistic tool of the Armenians’ (ibid.). And he (2007b) has been the subject of libellous newspaper articles: ‘There [wa]s no record of a call, not one single email from [the newspaper]. They never bothered to contact me. They didn’t check their facts or attempt to interview me. And when I demanded a correction, the editor-in-chief ignored my letter.’

At one point, Akçam’s (2007a) Wikipedia page was ‘persistently vandalized’. Then, when he went to Canada to give a lecture on the Armenian Genocide, he was detained by Canadian border police due to the claims in one out-of-date, vandalised edit. Seemingly, one or more members of ‘Tall Armenian Tale and[[/or] the... Turkish Forum,... had seized the opportunity to denounce [him]’ and used the published falsehoods to trick or trap the police into detaining him (ibid.), in order to intimidate him and to interfere with his research and teaching.

‘You will never be quite sure that I will not be listening to you’

As Seydali (2010) publicly warned me during the spread of Atun’s newspaper article, ‘you may continue to deliver your poli-thriller but you will never be quite sure that I will not be listening to you’. Supposedly to find out the source of my information concerning the assassination of Kutlu Adali, even though I had stated my source, and it was the police’s Chief Investigative Officer at the time of the assassination, Tema Irkad (2000), Atun (2010aa) privately notified me that he had it ‘in mind to inform our Criminal Department of the TRNC Police HQ to interrogate you upon your arrival to North Cyprus’.
If he is listening, he’s one of few

This case raises questions about the social significance of unblogged as well as blogged research. Although books are significant media for publication, it is undeniably significant that 48% of peer-reviewed research articles in social sciences, some majority of peer-reviewed research articles in archaeology specifically, and 93% of peer-reviewed research articles in humanities are never cited (Hamilton, 1991; Pendlebury, 1991); and 80% of citations in humanities are concentrated in 7% of the cited articles (Larivière, Gingras and Archambault, 2009).

Some argue that any reduction in citation is a sign of efficient sourcing of key information (e.g. Evans, 2008), and that these statistics are evidence of the advance of knowledge (e.g. Garfield, 1998). Nonetheless, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that many scholars are publishing many works ‘on the periphery of human interest’ (Gordon, 2014). Even the demonstrably inconsequential archaeology blogging under discussion has a readership hundreds of times larger than the readership of the average archaeology article.

Still, the simple act of making archaeology visible through blogging is not enough to describe it as knowledge mobilisation or professional/public engagement. I “mobilised” my work, but it did not go anywhere. I “engaged” colleagues and communities, but I did not establish a connection, let alone a change in thought or action. I fear that nine years’ research blogging has had negligible social impact.

Nonetheless, it has at least enabled immediate, multilingual communication, which was not possible even for the official release of the pre-submitted abstract of the conference paper (cf. Hardy, 2010o). In addition, it has enabled the presentation of sources for fact-checking with an immediacy that is not possible even through the online editions of most academic journals. The result of the Nazi War Diggers case suggests that, through collective public action, notably through collective public blogging and micro-blogging, archaeologists do (or can) have the power to drive real social change. Perhaps it would be fairer to judge that ten years’ research has had negligible social impact, and blogging has been unable to change that.
Acknowledgements

Thanks to Prof. Shawn Graham, who thought of ways for me to measure the comparative influence of the publications, before I realised just how one-directional the flow of information and opinion was.

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