

ARWA Guidelines for Ethical and Responsible Research

(draft from the ARWA Ethics LG, reviewed by the Executive Board)

The International Association for Archaeological Research in Western & Central Asia welcomes scholars and advanced students from all countries, and encourages their collaboration in order to contribute to the progress of archaeological research and related disciplines.

ARWA members must be able to work freely, but they also have responsibilities. The ethical foundations of these responsibilities, in addition to aspects linked to scientific integrity, also concern the preservation of the environment and commonly shared heritage. Researchers may be faced with ethical dilemmas that concern their research work or research topics, their responsibilities, the impact of their research on society, the way to conduct their research and to disseminate it, as well as many other aspects.

These guidelines invite ARWA members and the archaeological community to reflect on the values that motivate our actions and their consequences. Such a guide calls on our moral sensibilities and our responsibilities.

Relationships with colleagues

ARWA is an inclusive association with members representing a wide range of disciplines: history, philology, art history, archaeology, geoarchaeology, and all sub-disciplines of archaeometry and bioarchaeology. We acknowledge and accept that conventions differ between disciplines, countries, and cultures.

Collegiality is one of the basic rules guiding researchers and should be applied by colleagues working in Western and Central Asia, both locals and non-locals. This includes sharing the results of our research within a reasonable timeframe by making them accessible to the international scientific community, to local and regional stakeholders, and to the general public. This also means acknowledging all contributions, including those by colleagues, students and workers involved in fieldwork, as well as institutional, material, and funding support. In joint projects, we respect equal representation of all partners to achieve genuine collaboration.

The countries where we work may be in a state of war, economic and humanitarian crisis, under occupation, impacted by an epidemic or natural disaster, etc., and some of them may not respect the Declaration of Human Rights or international laws concerning cultural heritage. We seek to safeguard and help colleagues in precarious conditions, providing them access to scientific documentation.

Through our activities, we raise academic and public awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage, we teach ethical and responsible research practices to our students and introduce them to this ethical guide.

Relationships with institutions and states

Archaeology and archaeologists research not only ancient settlements and artifacts, but the past of human societies and the social evolution of humankind. As such, the researchers involved are influenced by the policies of institutions and states, and by the daily political situations they encounter. Collegiality is one of the basic rules not only between archaeologists, but also between the different institutions to which they belong. This principle should be independent of the politics of states and institutions, where possible.

The principle that should guide relations with institutions and countries is the protection of archaeological and historical cultural heritage. ARWA promotes the guidelines set out by The Hague and other conventions (see the list at the end) which defend and protect archaeological and cultural heritage, and which stand against practices that violate these guidelines by force, occupation, or through state and institutional policies. Furthermore, the ARWA community defends the right of states to protect archaeological, historical and cultural heritage. We strongly denounce the illegal sale of

antiquities to other countries, institutions, museums, and individuals, both locally and outside the country of origin.

Relationships with NGOs

Archaeologists have the freedom of consultative and/or associative relationships with international, national, and/or local NGOs. The relationship, however, should be within the framework of supporting the work of archaeologists scientifically, helping in site preservation, raising awareness on the importance of cultural heritage, and developing education.

The relationship with NGOs could be in the form of joint operational projects or in the contribution of services and technical expertise. Such an NGO should not have been established by intergovernmental agreement, or by a government, and its goals, functions, structure, and operation should be non-governmental, peaceful, democratic, and non-profitmaking in character.

The NGO should meet the following criteria:

- it shall be engaged or have interest in activities in one or more specific fields of ancient studies
- it carries out its activities in a spirit of cooperation, tolerance, and solidarity, and in the interest and respect of humanity
- it shall have a recognized legal status
- it shall have a permanent headquarters and be governed by a democratically adopted constitution.¹

Archaeologists should be aware that working with NGOs in most non-democratic countries is potentially problematic and might be sometimes dangerous. Incautious cooperation with national or local NGOs in some Central and Western Asian countries might cause negative consequences for the local individuals working at the NGOs or on the work of the archaeologists themselves. Therefore, the archaeologist should follow the local legal framework for cooperation with NGOs, without contradicting human rights.

In cases of the need for emergency cooperation with NGOs in areas where the official government of the country has no authority, the archaeologist should follow the international laws of the UN.

Relationships with Society

Archaeologists should aim to create a project model based on the meaningful participation of all society stakeholders. Professional archaeologists should commit to the public dissemination and communication of their archeological data and research findings through for example interactive websites, lecturing, temporary exhibits, writing in popular blogs, social media, school programs, teacher workshops, and other educational initiatives. They should also produce site leaflets, brochures and erect permanent signs on site with substantial information and guiding plans.

Archaeologists should be respectful of local cultures and traditions as long as they do not violate human rights. They should not engage with the apparatus of oppressive regimes and maintain their interactions only through the representatives of the antiquities authorities.

Work undertaken in occupied territories, including their internal waters and territorial seas “*shall, unless circumstances do not permit, be carried out in close co-operation with the competent national authorities.*” (as per the second protocol of [The Hague second protocol, 1999](#)). They should engage positively with the legitimate ancestral or cultural connections of members of the local community to the ancient inhabitants of the site.

Community archaeology models should be the norm and not the exception. Archaeologists should value sites in their totality, from the earliest archeological remains of the site to the present-day communities that surround them. Archaeological projects should be inclusive and prioritize immediate positive impact on local communities. Fieldwork should involve the local community on all levels: economic, educational, professional training, site preservation strategies, long-term project plans. Plans for fieldwork should consider the environmental impact of the project and the well-being of the local community.

¹ UNESCO Basic Texts: 2020 Edition (revised edition), P.155 [372956eng.pdf \(unesco.org\)](#)

Unprovenanced objects

In many regions, looting of sites or museums and illicit trafficking which feed the antiquities market with illegally acquired artefacts, has been an issue. Conflicts that have affected – and still affect - several countries in Central and Western Asia have resulted in increasing looting. As researchers, we are committed to reflecting on how to deal with such unprovenanced artefacts (i.e. artefacts which lack a documented chain of custody), with private collectors and antique dealers eager to authenticate these artefacts, with other colleagues who authenticate them, with publications that include unprovenanced artefacts, etc. Finding best practices requires scholars to balance their intellectual and ethical responsibilities, depending on the general and specific contexts, in full awareness and conscience.

Before starting any study, it is vital to identify the provenance of the artefact and to be sure that the object has not been exported illegally.² We must be aware of, and obey laws regarding cultural heritage in the countries in which we work. Scholars who discover that the material on which they are working was illegally acquired have an obligation to work towards its repatriation to its country of origin.

More generally, scholars have the responsibility to educate the general public, and dealers in cultural heritage, about the dangers of trafficking in unprovenanced objects.

Sharing of data

ARWA members should be cooperative and generous with data sharing. They should consider reasonable requests from colleagues for access to materials and records, and try to respond positively. Publication should be timely, with respect to local rules and regulations. Individuals, institutions and funders have a responsibility to support this and, where it is problematic, actively seek alternative routes to publication.

To use unpublished data, scholars should seek permission from project directors, appropriate institution officials, and/or the antiquities authorities in the country of origin. Joint projects should have clear agreements that delineate the division/sharing of responsibilities and data in a collegial manner. ARWA encourages open access publications, open data and efforts to translate parts or whole publications in the language of the host country/ies to facilitate sharing of data in a way that bridges economic and linguistic disparities.

Digital documentation in archaeology has become widely adopted. Such approaches must be inclusive and the data produced must be available to the antiquities authorities and archaeology departments in the country of origin. Digital portals should be user-friendly and – if needed – software and data management training should be provided to local users. Publication should aim to high standards and authors should do their utmost to ensure access to individuals and institutions that are lacking good library provisions or where journal/book prices may be prohibitive.

Ethics and conflict

In conditions of, or circumstances relating to conflict, archaeologists and cultural heritage professionals can face dilemmas for which there may be no clear solutions. There are difficult moral choices to be made. While, theoretically, the regular activity of archaeology is conducted under the ethics of impartial empirical research, archaeology is inherently political and politicized and this is commonly amplified and distorted in situations of conflict. For this reason, archaeologists whose work impinges on conflict zones and conflictual politics/positions/ideologies face irregular situations outside those normally experienced in the practice of fieldwork and other research activities.

² Unesco Convention on the 'Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property' (14 Nov. 1970): https://web.archive.org/web/20180526133437/http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13039&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

When operating within theatres of conflict and war, archaeologists should consider the following issues:

- Archaeologists should consider carefully the ethics of working with regimes which do not respect human rights and do not protect cultural property.
- They should be conscious and sensitive to situations where saving ancient heritage can have negative effects on heritage/land/rights relevant to indigenous and local living populations and evaluate what actions are most ethical.
- They must be conscious of, and avoid feeding, political propaganda where groups and nation-states use destruction as a political weapon, or manipulate the past to fulfil nationalist, racist and/or religious agendas.
- Archaeologists working in post-conflict forensics must be aware of the potential uses to which their findings may be put.

When operating in post-conflict environments, archaeologists should be sensitive to the impact caused by loss of cultural heritage on local communities. They should be conscious of the cultural, economic and political implications of post-conflict heritage restoration and support efforts to ensure that benefits from such work are spread as evenly as possible throughout the local community.

ARWA is committed to the protection of cultural heritage but also to the international charter for human rights. ARWA therefore cannot condone the protection of heritage at the expense of human rights and urges its members to avoid actions that put people and communities at risk of human rights abuses, or deny them civil liberties. ARWA recommends that its members comply to the best of their ability with the values it promotes, even in situations of conflict:

- Protection of heritage and environment
- Protection of human rights
- Peace and reconciliation
- International solidarity
- Cultural, ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity
- Education and capacity building
- Social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation
- Sustainable local development
- Nonviolence

ARWA rejects any kind of discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or disability. In addition, activities implemented by ARWA members should comply with international conventions relating to heritage, in particular:

- The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict ([Convention of The Hague and first protocol, 1954](#), and [second protocol, 1999](#))
- The [Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transport of Ownership of Cultural Property](#) (UNESCO, 1970)
- The [UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Property](#) (UNIRIGHT, 1995)
- The [Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage](#) (UNESCO, 2001)
- The [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#) (UNESCO, 2003)