



Lecture Evening

Dr. Yağmur Heffron


A Partnership of Unequals

Historicising Labour Relations between Local and Foreign Archaeologists in Türkiye through Ottoman Comparanda

Part I – Invisible Labour and the Double "Sift"

October 15, 17:30

C Blok Amfi

The
Department of
Archaeology

Bilkent University

This lecture is Part I of an extended discussion arising from a recent co-authored article published in a special issue on the "Histories of Labor in Archaeology" for the Bulletin of the History of Archaeology (Heffron and Tütüncü-Çağlar 2024).

Taking its departure from an ethno-autobiographical account of labour relations on international fieldwork projects in Türkiye, this lecture will highlight the invisible labour of native Turkish-speakers acting as mediators in order to facilitate the professional, educational, and day-to-day activities of their foreign counterparts.

While the need for interpreters is often an inevitable and legitimate aspect of fieldwork conducted outside one's own linguistic and cultural milieu, the ubiquitously informal reliance on native-speakers to take on interlocutors' tasks as favours or side-jobs conceals the extent of time, labour, and resources being extracted. Such a division of labour interferes with the agency of local archaeologists as trained experts in their own right, pushing them to the periphery of professional research activity and reinforcing colonial notions of archaeological knowledge as the prerogative of Western 'experts' assisted by local 'facilitators'.

The lecture offers a critical reflection on such fieldwork dynamics not only as a matter of archaeological ethics but also an epistemological issue, with significant implications for the production and consumption of archaeological knowledge. In doing so, the lecture will establish a broader theoretical framework for the upcoming Part II, in which Filiz Tütüncü-Çağlar will historicise archaeological labour relations through an Ottoman case study.

Yağmur is an archaeologist and social historian of ancient Anatolia, whose work explores the convergence of material culture and textual history. Her research focuses on the religious history of Anatolia in the early second millennium B.C., particularly on issues of religious identity, ritual hybridity, and textual vs. material visibility of cult practices. Yağmur's work seeks to articulate viable methodologies of integrating text, image, and archaeology. Her more recent research extends into histories of archaeology, contemporary labour relations, and language and gender politics in archaeological fieldwork in Türkiye.

As an active field archaeologist for over 20 years, Yağmur has worked at various sites in Türkiye, including two former Bilkent projects at Hacımusalar Höyük and Kinet Höyük; Tell Atchana, Kilisetepe, Zincirli Höyük (where she served as Assistant Director between 2011-2013), Kültepe, and Çadır Höyük. In 2022, Yağmur joined the Uşaklı Höyük Archaeological Project as Assistant Director. Her current project at Uşaklı Höyük (quite possibly the Hittite cult centre, Zippalanda), seeks to explore the urban religious character of the settlement in the Late Bronze Age.

Yağmur currently holds a Lectureship in the History of the Ancient Middle East at UCL, in the Department of History.

