

Mobilizing the Materiality of Heritage: India and the World

Lecture Series at IIT Gandhinagar
Tuesday 8th to Sunday 13th August 2017

Tuesday 8th August — Project Mausam: India's attempt at Transnational heritage
Prof. Himanshu Prabha Ray

This presentation will discuss the Ministry of Culture's Project Mausam, which was launched at the 38th World Heritage Session at Doha, Qatar on 20th June, 2014 and its implications for maritime archaeology in India. The intertwining of natural phenomena such as monsoon winds or Mawsim in Arabic and the ways in which these were harnessed historically to create cultural networks provide building blocks for contemporary societies, as they work towards universal values and trans-border groupings – both of which underwrite UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention.

Wednesday 9th August — On Archaeology and Prehistoric Materialities at Çatalhöyük
Prof. Lynn Meskell

Contemporary archaeology has moved away from a purely, or purist, object-oriented approach, and concerns itself with multiple associations, layerings, scalar analyses, and specializations. This talk focuses on my research on Neolithic figurines—once the domain of artistic descriptions and quasi-religious projections—is situated within a diachronic spatial analysis, clay sourcing, and manufacture, and similarly involves ascertaining the volumes of midden deposits, comparisons with the percentages of species in faunal assemblages, considerations of human body shape from isotopic data extracted from human bone, and so on. In archaeology, such chains of evidence and associations build a greater richness and understanding of things, but in doing so perhaps things lose their boundedness, their discrete qualities, and what makes them special or separate.

Thursday 10th August — UNESCO World Heritage: A New Global Order of Things
Prof. Lynn Meskell

UNESCO and its World Heritage program form the centerpiece of this paper today because together they represent the aspirations of an international community, the limitations of world government, concerns for protection and rights, and notions of the global good. At the heart of this mission has always been archaeological and cultural heritage, and to a lesser degree, natural heritage. UNESCO is one of the most powerful arenas where archaeology reaches worldwide attention and yet archaeologists themselves seem largely invisible in the political processes, governance, and public profile of the organization. That seeming invisibility, however, masks a substantial archaeological network of field projects and practitioners around the globe, consultants, site evaluators, conservators, training projects, university courses and so on. India has long held an important place in the World Heritage system and I shall describe some of those developments and their political implications.

Friday 11th August — World Heritage and WikiLeaks: Territory, Trade and Temples on the Thai-Cambodian Border

Prof. Lynn Meskell

Globalization and world-making projects like UNESCO's World Heritage program have changed the stakes for particular heritage sites. Through processes of greater interdependence and connectivity specific sites are transformed into transactional commodities with exchange values that transcend their historical or material characteristics and thus can be wrested from those contexts to serve other international interests. To illustrate I employ evidence from the U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks to offer an unprecedented vantage onto one contested archaeological site, Preah Vihear temple in Cambodia. Thrust into the international spotlight with UNESCO World Heritage inscription in 2008, followed by the International Court of Justice rulings, we can trace the site's connectivity across national political intrigues, international border wars, bilateral negotiations surrounding gas and steel contracts, and military alignments. The very fact that so much politicking occurred around one site, one that was largely invisible in international heritage circles until its controversial UNESCO listing and the resultant border war, is instructive. What the leaked cables essentially reveal are the linkages between seemingly unrelated spheres and events, thus underscoring the intricate hyper-connectivity of heritage.

Saturday 12th August — Video of a [talk by Prof. Ian Hodder](#), Director of Catal Huyuk Project: Ritual Origins of Settled Life; Göbekli and Çatalhöyük

Prof. Lynn Meskell will answer questions related to the video.

Recent archaeological discoveries have upturned our theories about the origins of agriculture and the dawn of settled life. While climate change and economic adaptation have long been seen as prime causes, recent work at Göbekli and Çatalhöyük in Turkey has shown that social gatherings at ritual centers played a key role. The remarkable finds at Göbekli include 6 meter stone monoliths carved with images of animals and birds and forming ritual enclosures. Recent research at Çatalhöyük shows a fully fledged town in which wild bulls, leopards and the severed heads of ancestors were important social foci.

Sunday 13th August: Site visit to Viramgam, 60 kms from Ahmedabad

Mr. Jitu Mishra of Virasat-i-Hind will lead the visit; he is an archaeologist from Deccan College, Pune, and will also talk about his project to conserve the site and revive the tank.

Munser Talav, on the outskirts of the walled town of Viramgam, is one of the largest medieval water related structures in Gujarat. The lake was built in the 12th century AD by Minal Devi, the mother of Gujarat's most powerful monarch Siddharaj Jaisinh. The lake was conceived as a tirtha (pilgrimage) and was in the form of a cow's head. Minal Devi erected 520 miniature shrines in early Chalukyan style, out of which 360 survive today. Most of them are Shiva shrines along with a few Vaishnava shrines. There are also two large temples built in the middle of the southern side currently called Sas Bahu temples.