

Blogging Archaeology: Creating an Open Access Source for Knowledge

Bloganje arheologije: odpiranje dostopa do znanja

© Vasilka Dimitrovska

Izveček: Pomen izrazov “blog” in “blogger”/“blogar” je predmet številnih debat. Ne glede na definicije, ki jih najdemo na Internetu, lahko rečemo, da so blogi stvar idej, ustvarjanja, izmenjave mnenj, izražanja pogledov, debatiranja in še mnogo več. Blogi so manifestacija ustvarjalnosti v njeni izvorni obliki, ki jih zdaj omogočajo interaktivna multumedijska orodja.

Še več, blogi so lahko odlični virtualni prostori učenja, samoizobraževanja in diskusije, predvsem s strokovnjaki za določene teme, ki zanimajo urednika bloga. Ta članek temelji na mojih izkušnjah z bloganjem o arheologiji, predvsem v makedonščini, in vseh izzivih, s katerimi sem se srečala v zadnjih treh letih.

Ključne besede: blog, bloganje, Internet, arheologija, znanost, znanje

Abstract: The meaning of the terms ‘blog’ and ‘blogger’ has been the subject of numerous debates. It can be said that blogs are about ideas, creativity, exchanging opinions, expressing attitudes, debating, and much more. Blogs are a manifestation of creativity in its original form using the means of the currently available interactive multimedia forms.

Furthermore, blogs can be excellent virtual spaces for learning, self-education and discussion, mostly with an expert in a particular field of interest, which could be the blog creator. This article is based on my personal experience with blogging on archaeology - mostly in the Macedonian language - and the challenges I faced during the last three years.

Keywords: blog, blogging, Internet, archaeology, science, open source, knowledge

1. Scientific aspects of blogging

How do you know that my blog is reliable?

Have you ever heard of the Bosnian Pyramids? Many of you probably have, but no one has actually seen them. Three years ago, the Founder of the Pyramids (if you can say so about something you cannot see), Mr. Osmanagić, published a book about their origins¹.

For those who are not familiar with the so-called Bosnian Pyramids, the book describes Semir Osmanagić’s ‘scientific’ theory which claims that there are a number of human-made pyramids in the vicinity of the town of Visoko. Apart from making parallels to other world pyramids, the book explores other issues, such as tracing for ‘evidence’ that Bosnian Ilirs are 27,000 years old, the magnetic ball phenomenon, the global energy grid, etc. The book is available for free download from the official website of the Bosnian Pyramids, which in time developed into a proper foundation² and even obtained the financial support of the Bosnian Government.

Is this book a source of scientific knowledge and does it offer some sort of reliable archeological data? One year after the book came out of print, on April 14, 2006, ex-

cavation works commenced and – they are still ongoing, trying to prove Osmanagić’s claims. So far, there hasn’t been a single result from the excavation.

The value of the claims of this book were questioned and repudiated from the onset. Things got for more complicated when AIA and UNESCO got involved. The Archaeological Institute of America³ rejected Osmanagić’s theory, denied any connection of the Pyramids with the ongoing archaeological excavation, and sent a letter to United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) about it. The letter to UNESCO concludes statement that Bosnia and Herzegovina came out of the 1992-95 war without some of her most important and beautiful cultural and historical heritage gems. Mr. Osmanagić and the activities of his team pose a serious threat to the rich historical, cultural and archaeological heritage of the Visoko region. It would be irresponsible to let pseudo-archaeology finish off what is left intact⁴. More information on this case is available by Marko Rose⁵.

Archeology is a science that seeks physical evidence, or artifacts. Its’ claims to scientific truths are based solely on

1 Osmanagić S. 2005, *Bosanska piramida sunca, Mauna Fe*, Sarajevo, viewed 24 May 2008, <<http://www.alternativnahistorija.com/AH8.htm#4>>.

2 Archaeological Park: Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation 2008, Foundation created by Osmanagić to promote his interpretations (Bosnian)/(English), viewed 24 May 2008, <<http://www.piramida-sunca.ba/>>.

3 Archaeological Institute of America 2008, viewed 24 May 2008, <<http://www.archaeology.org/>>.

4 Rose M at all. 2006, *Bosnian pyramids: A pseudoarchaeological myth and a threat to the existing cultural and historical heritage of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, viewed 20 April 2008, <<http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/osmanagic/UNESCO.pdf>>.

5 Rose M. 2006, *More on Bosnian “Pyramids”*, A publication of the Archaeological Institute of America, viewed 24 May 2008, <<http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/osmanagic/update.html>>.

artifacts. Still, the absence of available evidence that something does not exist is not proof that the thing exists.⁶

If the Bosnian Pyramids are still not refuted by hard evidence proving them to be a false claim, it does not mean that they exist. It does not mean that they do not exist either. So long as there is no evidence to prove Osamangic right or wrong, his theories remain an imaginative possibility. Not science. Science bases its claims on hard data, and/or endorses consistent ideas with high explanatory power. (Quantum physics, for instance, is sheer imagination, but it has high explanatory power and, moreover, it is applicable/testable in technology.)

As a scientist, I would evaluate the case of the Bosnian Pyramids as a masterpiece of the so-called pseudo-archaeology. In my opinion, this is one of the most cleverly performed archeological marketing campaigns ever. To achieve the goal of this campaign, the new media was used - websites and blogs. Actually, the so-called 'scientific argumentation in favor of the existence of the Pyramids took place on the web. Mostly it was a virtual war between those people who support or deny Osmanagić work.

After the war in former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina was lost as a country. The entire infrastructure and its economy were devastated and the new political system still is less than functional. For the country to position itself on the global map in any positive connotation, one of the few available ways was through mystification and popularization of the cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is always 'in', because it belongs to the whole world, it affects even remote areas and peoples. But seductions of pseudo archaeology, or pseudoscience in cyberspace can be really dangerous.⁷

The case of Bosnian Pyramids is a clear cut proof that dubious scientists can have high community impact, governmental support and finances, and that using the Internet as a means of gaining popular support. All that by being able to dress their imagination in quasi-scientific language and simulate scientific argumentation and

6 Salt A. 2006, Bosnian Pyramids: Absence of Evidence is not Evidence of Atlantis, History News Network, viewed 18 April 2008, <<http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/25850.html>>.

7 Romey K. 2003, Seductions of Pseudoarchaeology: Pseudoscience in Cyberspace, A publication of the Archaeological Institute of America, Volume 56 Number 3, viewed 05 February 2008, <<http://www.archaeology.org/0305/etc/web.html>>.

context. How to differentiate between proper science and quasi-science?⁸

On the Internet I could be anybody. I could have a virtual name, or I could even have a virtual title. Does this mean anything to you – Daren Wilson, graduated archaeologist? Of course not. How do you know that I am really Vasilka Dimitrovska, archaeologist? So, how do you know that my blog is a reliable source of archaeological knowledge?⁹

How to establish the credibility of the content of a archaeological scientific blog?

A scientific blog, especially about archaeology, is a form that records the present scientific approach to a specific issue or topic. Science too can treat issues from different perspectives. However, the problem of different perspectives is two-sided. It is difficult to liberate science from politically engaged scientists, like in the case of the Bosnian Pyramids, best described by the post-structuralist's saying: „Give me a couple of facts, and I'll construct you a truth.“

As non-specialists in a certain area, how can you evaluate the credibility of a content you find on the internet? Here are some guidelines and hints - each responsible scientist would follow certain academic/scientific procedures in his or her writing, published on paper or on the net:

Content:

- Using other reliable sources
- Logical analysis, often of multiple possibilities, including evaluation of probability of truth;
- Presenting arguments from all conflicting sides of the debate on the given subject, etc.
- The scientist's own opinion/conclusion, refraining from claims of absolute certitude
- Style and format:
- Towards to impersonal style: most scientists refrain from subjective references: there would be rarely any

8 CRISP 2005-2007, На кој веб-сајт треба да му верувам?, viewed 27 March 2008, <http://www.crisp.org.mk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=53>.

9 Димитровска В. 2008, Археолошки дневник vol.2, viewed 25 March 2008, <<http://arheo.com.mk/>>.

- ‘I’ in the text. The style would approximate objectiveness.
- Proper referencing of used sources (name of the author, the publication, year of publishing, publishing house, etc.)
- Hyperlinks in e-texts leading to referenced data sources.
- Bibliography
- Clear non-ambiguous meaning of sentences.
- Good spelling, absence of colloquialisms. Professional jargon accurately used.

Proper delineation of thematic segments within a text: problem examined contemporary scientific debates on it, the author’s own claim/thesis, definition of key terms, delineation of scope of text, contrary arguments to support or negate the author’s claim, relevant data, data analysis, conclusions, etc.

p.s. if you can not find on the web blog, Google the author’s name.

2. Blogging science: create open access source for knowledge through communication

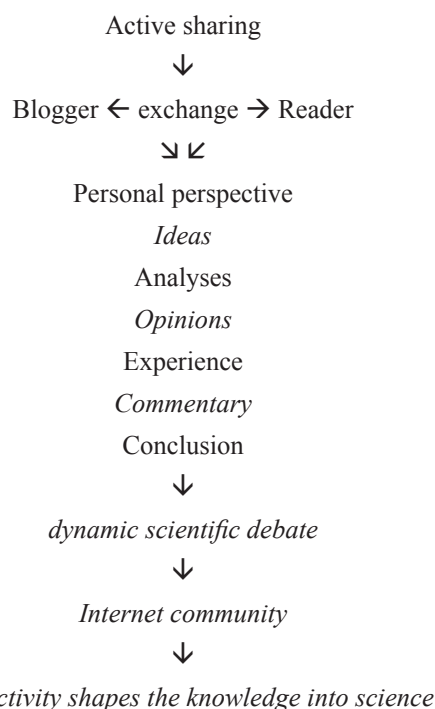
1. Typical differences between printed archaeological journals and archeo web blogs.

Printed archaeological journals		Acheo websites and blogs
Printed (Limited)		Electronic (access in any time)
Subscription	← on line →	Free
Rigid	discussions	Flexible
Static	information	Dynamic
		↓
		Updated

Unlike the books and printed journals, the blog allows for direct response and exchange ideas between the author and the reader. Thus, it surpasses the passive role of the reader as defined by a printed medium.

With the development of the New Media and especially Web 2.0, the blogs were enabled to incorporate a wild

range of *textual* (links, notes, commentary etc.) and *visual media* (photography, slide, video, pod cast etc). This dynamic interface allows:



The blog, as a medium, allows direct connection between the *blogger* and the *reader*. This exchanging of *opinions*, *ideas*, and *commentary* can raise the level of the *dynamic scientific debate*. The most important thing in hand is the *personal perspective* of the owner of the blog, who gives their own *suggestions* and personal *experience* exposing its strengths and weaknesses of the presented thesis to the critical gaze of the audience. Anyone can *comment*, regardless to whether the blogger is right or wrong.

This *interactivity shapes the Internet community*. Also it shapes the knowledge that in this manner is accessible to all. We can freely assume that this approach enables new quality in global inter-personal scientific and educational activities.

The biggest difference and the problem of blogging about archaeology lie in the lack of peer reviews which constitutes the main difference between blog posts and scientific articles. The peer review method allows for a scientific paper to meet a certain set of standards and

is a process that sometimes may take months to complete, whereas blog posts appear online when their writer deems fit. This can be abused by the public and that's why the same procedure was applied to this particular article, too, in its transformation from a blog post into a scientific paper.

Blogging archaeology by academics is not only a medium of communication, but the blog also allows to the author to extend the impact of his or her expertise to a non-academic audience and to make it available to individuals who cannot afford printed journals.

It also takes considerable courage to publish a text on the Internet, face a flood of readers' comments and keep one's ground. This is an issue I've been dealing with for the past three years since I opened my first blog. I do not know my readers, their age range or their academic background. All I want is to share my expertise in form of a lasting blog record, to live on and be incorporated in the scientific discourse, and even surpassed one day as outdated.

The inclusion of a wider audience in blog debates may contextualize the discussed theme. This is a process of shaping mental structures on the Internet, out of which a certain scientific version may arise. In this way, the available information on a scientific blog can be used as a general knowledge resource, offering educative texts and comments to later readers.

Digital Media can be used for blogging as much as for study and research. The increase of the available online media platforms, especially blogs, which are usually free of charge, leads to increase of the number of archaeologists who present their expertise on the web.

But, the academic world of archaeology is a little behind regarding this issue even in global frames, although a large number of the so called Archeoblogs are noticeable. As the archeologist William R. Caraher, the author of the blog „The Archaeology of the Mediterranean World”¹⁰ explains in his very popular article „Blogging Archaeology and the Archaeology of Blogging”¹¹, the

10 Caraher W. 2008, The Archaeology of the Mediterranean World, viewed 20 May 2008, < <http://mediterraneanworld.typepad.com/>>.

11 Caraher W. 2008, Blogging Archaeology and the Archaeology of Blogging, A publication of the Archaeological Institute of America, Volume 61 Number 3, viewed 17 January 2008, <<http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/blogs/>>.

biggest hindrance that the archaeologists that blog face is the ephemeral nature of the blogs. Most academic institutions do not regard blogging as a genuine academic exercise. On the other side, blogging seeks a lot of time and energy that scientist not often possess. Thus the momentous blogging about archeology is diminished in the borders of the free time of the scientist to put his data on the Internet.

Is the Blog a New Tool for New Thinking?

Today, most scientific institutions in the field of archeology, parallel to their official websites, have their blogs¹². So for this is mostly for the U.K. and U.S. based institution such is the case with Archaeolog¹³, one of the best collaborative blogs on the net. The Archaeolog is maintained by the Department of Archaeology at the Stanford University. Any archaeologist from around the world can submit an article there. This blog borders a collaborative e-journal.

Frequently, archaeological associations hosting symposiums open a blog parallel to their official website. The blog responds to the need of quick exchange of information, which would clog a static website. The blog also enables participants to interlink without the need of a moderator or a central communication node. Such is the case with the European Association of Archaeologists¹⁴ (EAA) who use their blog¹⁵ to discuss subjects unavailable at their main site. At the upcoming World Archaeological Congress¹⁶ (WAC) 2008, one of the segments' titles is Archaeology in the Digital Age 2.0. ¹⁷ A blog has been

12 The Viking Archaeology Blog 2008, viewed 13 October 2008, <<http://www.archaeology.eu.com/vikings/weblog/>>; Ohio Archaeology Blog 2008, viewed 13 October 2008; <<http://ohio-archaeology.blogspot.com/>>; Harvard University Press Publicity Blog: Archaeology 2008, viewed 13.10.2008, <http://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/archaeology/>.

13 Archaeolog 2008, viewed 20 April 2008, <<http://traumwerk.stanford.edu/archaeolog/>>.

14 Leszczewicz A. & Květinová S. 2008, European Association of Archaeologists, viewed 20 May 2008, <<http://www.e-a-a.org/>>.

15 Kristensen T. & Holtorf C. 2008, European Journal of Archaeology, viewed 25 May 2008, <<http://eja.e-a-a.org/>>.

16 World Archaeological Congress 2008, viewed 28.04.2008, < <http://www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org/site/home.php>>.

17 Ashley M. & all. 2008, Archaeology in the Digital Age 2.0, Sixth World Archaeological Congress, viewed 25 May 2008, <<http://www.wac6.org/livesite/item.php?itemID=24&itemType=THEME>>.

open especially for this session.¹⁸ This blog contains all information that would cause information overload at the static website.

Colleen Morgan, from Anthropology Department, University of California, Berkeley is the moderator of this session. On her personal blog, she has published a text containing the following quote:¹⁹

„Archaeologists have been rapidly integrating new media technologies into their interpretive schemes through a variety of methods. Virtual worlds, social networking websites, blogs, wikis, and digital photo mash-ups are becoming legitimate alternate ways to present archaeological information. Lower entry points for remixing photography, film, and databases into multimodal presentations increase the potential for archaeologists to use these media to tell their own stories. This, combined with a growing ubiquity of online media platforms, allows us to reach out to new publics by integrating archaeology into a greater social sphere”.

Conclusion: Where lies the base of knowledge on the Internet

Sometimes people learn from me, sometimes it is the other way around. Knowledge is not finite or limited, it is everywhere around us. But knowledge is not just information.

Scientific knowledge, in all its spheres, does not consist merely of publishing *raw data*. Knowledge is built by *human interpretation, analysis and linking of data*. This act which transforms information into knowledge lies in communication. The blog enables that.

The motto of my blog is „The history of knowledge is not given - it has to be constructed” So, I would like to invite you. Let’s create it together. Let’s create knowledge which would belong to the whole world. So,

BLOG YOUR EXPERTISE. CREATE AN OPEN
ACCESS SOURCE FOR KNOWLEDGE THROUGH
COMMUNICATION ON THE INTERNET.

¹⁸ Colleen Morgan 2008, Archaeology in the Digital Age 2.0, viewed 24 May 2008, <<http://digitalarchaeology.wordpress.com/>>.

¹⁹ Colleen Morgan 2008, Archaeology in the Digital Age 2.0, viewed 24 May 2008, <<http://middlesavagery.wordpress.com/2008/01/22/wac-2008-call-for-participation/>>.

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²⁰ Harvard Style - referencing online sources 2008, viewed 13 October 2008, <http://www.library.uq.edu.au/training/citation/harvard_5.pdf>.
