

Who Owns the Indian Past? The Case of the Indus Civilization

by
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The question 'who owns the past' is not a rhetorical question. On the one hand, it is tied to the issue of identities, which have played a major role in archaeological research since its very inception, and on the other, it is bound up with the various features of cultural resource management including the thorny relationship between mainstream archaeology and the rights of indigenous people in countries like the USA, Australia and Canada.

There is a vast amount of literature on both themes. The first one, i.e. the question of identity, is linked to the establishment of national identity as well as various other collective identities like gender, ethnicity and religion. The issue of identity may assume many forms and generate many debates. In the context of Israel and the Palestinian territory, it has been argued,¹ for instance, that there are four types of 'desired pasts' there: (1) the Israeli desired past which is sought by the Israeli state and the Jewish organizations of the United States; (2) the conservative Christian past which is championed by the Christian fundamentalist organizations, the American School of Oriental Research and the Biblical Archaeological Society; (3) the Palestinian desired past, favoured by the Palestinian rights organizations and Palestinian archaeologists and intellectuals; and finally, (4) the diplomatic desired past, as represented by the appointed officials of the US State department.

*This is a revised version of a lecture presented at India International Centre on 21 July 2009.

¹Sandra Scham, 'Diplomacy and Desired Pasts', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 9(2), 2009, pp. 163-99.