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Franklin, Kathryn and Babajanyan, A. (2018) The power of making places: collaborative heritage and working with ARISC in Armenia. *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 6 (3), pp. 205-216. ISSN 2166-3548.

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The Power of Making Places: Collaborative heritage and working with ARISC in Armenia

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Abstract

This paper discusses the origins and ongoing research of the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey (VDSRS), a collaborative archaeological project that for the last 3 years has focused on the recording, research, and management of the medieval landscape in Vayots Dzor, Armenia. The VDSRS was created in a space opened by the commitment and support of the Armenian Research Institute of the South Caucasus (ARISC), an Overseas Research Center supporting research in and about Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. We discuss the ways in which the support structure of ARISC has shaped both the potential for and the nature of research in Armenia, with an emphasis on collaborative work and on stewardship of archaeological heritage. As we will explore, in the case of Vayots Dzor and the VDSRS the ‘soft power’ of institutional support has enabled a critical shift in the demographics of who leads research, as well as an opening of possibilities for questions asked about the past and the accessibility of archaeological data.

Keywords: Overseas Research Centers; Armenia, collaboration, medieval Silk Road, heritage

Author Biographies

Dr. Kathryn Franklin is an anthropological archaeologist focused on material and spatial mediation of distance and difference in the medieval period. She has worked at multiple

medieval sites in the Republic of Armenia for almost a decade, and received her doctorate from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago in 2014. Kathryn taught Armenian archaeology and histories of Silk Road travel at the University of Chicago, and taught Anthropology at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; she is currently Project Manager for the Afghan Heritage Mapping Partnership, a collaborative geospatial project focused on the archaeological landscapes of Afghanistan, housed at the Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes at the University of Chicago Oriental Institute. For the last 3 years, Kathryn has been co-director (with Astghik Babajanyan) of the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey, a multiscalar project directed at the research and conservation of medieval Silk Road landscapes centered in Vayots Dzor, Armenia. Kathryn has published on Silk Road caravanserai in Armenia and their role in medieval social life, on the politics of assemblage related to medieval political performativity, on village spaces as articulated within social networks and along trade routes, and on the question of perceived and conceived frontiers in the medieval Caucasus.

Dr. Astghik Babajanyan received her M. A. in Art History and Theory from Yerevan State University in 2006 and her Ph.D. in Archaeology with a thesis on “The Ceramics of Armenia of the 14th-17th Centuries”, in 2015. She is employed at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, as archaeologist and senior researcher; from 2017 she has also been the president of Young Scientists Council. She is author of more than ten articles related to the history and archaeology of medieval Armenia. From 2015 she started a collaborative project with Dr. Kathryn Franklin (University of Chicago, Oriental Institute) on the archaeological survey of the medieval Silk Road in Vayots Dzor Region, Armenia (VDSRS). Her current research is focused on “The Material Culture of the Aragatsotn

region in the Middle Ages”. Her interests include also issues of habitation and urban system in the Ararat plain in the 9th-17th centuries.

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Introduction

As archaeology is in part the study of meaningful places, then through the perspective of heritage we might approach the process of making places meaningful as both an object and a responsibility of research. Archaeologists working with an awareness of the politics of archaeological heritage, and the power relations within the discipline itself, must partner discussions of the politics of the *use* of archaeology with explorations of the power structures that shape how archaeological sites are brought into being through research. In the case study presented here, we, the co-directors of the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey, discuss the rippling impacts upon local paradigms of knowledge created by the commitment to collaborative research on the part of Overseas Research Centers (ORCs). We have worked together for nearly 6 years in the Republic of Armenia, focusing on the connections between medieval Silk Road travel and exchange and local life in the valleys of the South Caucasus. Two of our fieldwork seasons were funded fully or in part by ARISC, the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus, an ORC supporting research in and about Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. We will focus on the power of ORCs like ARISC to ‘make places’ in two ways. First, we look at how ARISC supports the recording and preservation of archaeological sites in understudied areas. Second, and just as critically, we explore how ARISC’s commitment to emplaced collaborative work opens paradigmatic space, making room at the table in local power structures for new projects and

junior scholars to take a seat. Across our two funded field seasons, and in the years that followed, we have watched the space opened by ARISC widen: seed grants and institutional support from ARISC enabled us to jump start fledgling projects, as well as to push back against entrenched local power structures in order to develop richer, collaborative approaches to research and heritage management.

About ARISC

The American Research Institute of the South Caucasus (ARISC) is a relatively young organization, founded in 2006 by a committee of scholars including archaeologists Karen Rubinson and Adam T. Smith. A majority of the board of Directors of ARISC is made up of archaeologists, but the projects supported by the organization run the gamut of the social sciences, as expressed in their mission statement. ARISC's founding post-dates the breakup of the Soviet Union by 15 years; the ORC aims to mitigate the effects of both new borders and old paradigms on the practices of social science in the South Caucasus. The newness of ARISC is visible in the small physical footprint of the ORC on the ground: only in Georgia does ARISC currently have a brick and mortar facility, and is instead 'embodied' in local representatives in its member countries. In this regard, ARISC hardly compares as a 'place for making science happen' like the nearly century-old facilities of the W.F. Albright Institute for Archaeological Research or ARCE in Egypt. Thus the focus in 'making a place' for research in the South Caucasus at ARISC has been in the conceptual sense of creating opportunities for work, collaboration, and exchange. In this way, ARISC occupies a similar role to those more established centers, and through support of workshops, seminars and conferences in-country enables the casual cross-pollination (a sort of "tea circuit") which is critical to the functioning of ORCs as nodes of 'soft power' (Luke and Kersel 2013: 20). The recent founding of ARISC also

presents a singular opportunity to observe the effects of the ORC model from inception, and in a region at the nexus of multiple ‘soft power’ strategies. This is especially visible in the ARISC grants program which, by offering seed grants to junior scholars, serves as its most aggressive tool for scientific diplomacy.

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ARISC Grants

ARISC supports junior and collaborative research in the South Caucasus through 3 seed grant programs, currently listed on their website (<https://arisc.org>):

Junior Research Fellowship: This grant supports U.S. graduate students, postdoctoral and junior scholars in research and mentoring activities in the South Caucasus. The goals of the fellowship are 1) to support research in and the study of the South Caucasus; 2) to select, recognize and financially support individuals early in their careers who demonstrate high potential to contribute to research in the region; 3) to support a mentoring relationship that will both develop the academic skills of the mentee and strengthen ties between the US and host country. Up to 3 JRFs are presented per year, for the last four years.

Graduate/Postdoctoral Fellowship: This grant provides seed funding for projects in all fields in the social sciences, humanities and related sciences. Essentially, this fellowship covers travel and/or living expenses for a field project, and is limited to ARISC members

(a student membership is \$10). Three of these grants have been awarded per year for the past seven years.

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Collaborative Heritage Management in Armenia Grant (CHMAG): The CHMAG supports joint work by American and Armenian scholars, aimed at the curation, preservation and study of archaeological heritage, including sites and artifacts as well as manuscripts and legacy datasets. This grant requires that one co-director be a US resident and one be a resident of the Republic of Armenia.

The terms of all 3 of these grants contain commitments to both capacity building and results-sharing in-country, in the form of public lectures or other presentations of the work done on the grant. The Collaborative Heritage Management in Armenia Grant (henceforth CHMAG) also stresses the importance of public dissemination of results, signalling a dual commitment both to supporting new research as well as to a long view towards the local stakes in the sites and collections produced by that research. In terms of a cultural diplomatic strategy undertaken by ARISC, this grant then speaks to archaeological heritage as a point of intervention in the construction of identity politics and cultural practice in the Republic of Armenia.

The critical significance of heritage work in Armenia and the South Caucasus

Our work in Armenia and on Silk Road landscapes in Vayots Dzor especially is informed by the co-construction of politics and archaeology in the places we work; this is this context for the significance of an archaeologist's ability to 'make' archaeological places through research, and for the social relationships within which they do so. In the context of the material remains of the

Silk Road, we are situated to witness how narratives of past connectivity mediate understandings of current national identities in explicit relation to global cultures and world powers. Heritage, especially medieval heritage, is critical to the production of identity in the Republic of Armenia--and indeed, across the South Caucasus, as faiths, alphabets and geographical terms which define contemporary geopolitics are the products of medieval (AD 4th-15th c) societies. Medieval buildings and sites are hyper-visual as tourist attractions, landmarks, and monuments of the Christian Armenian state, and are drawn into a national narrative which interweaves 4th, 10th, and 20th century histories. Of the sites on the Inscribed and Tentative UNESCO World Heritage Lists for Armenia, all are medieval in date--and more than one quarter of the listed sites is located in Vayots Dzor (UNESCO n.d.). One of the central narratives through which modern Armenians link to their medieval past is through the narrative of the Silk Road, an evocative catch-all term for the transcontinental networks of trade routes, technological interchange and shared cultures within which Eurasian places like Armenia differentially participated from the late Classical through early modern periods. The idea of the Silk Road is now used, in Armenia as well as numerous other countries (and within academic research) to evoke a past time of connectivity, cosmopolitanism and economic dynamism. Significantly, in the last decade this idea of the Silk Road has driven development in both tourism and infrastructural development in Armenia, pushing the possibility that a medieval ideal of interconnectivity can overcome the balkanization of modern nation states. Thus, the regions of Vayots Dzor and neighboring Syunik are double-designated within state plans for development which draw on the possibility to use Armenia's Silk Road past to drive her future growth. The region was dubbed the "Southern Silk Road Corridor" in tourism strategies drawn up by Armenian governmental agencies (AECOM and NCFCA 2011). This was followed up by sites in Vayots Dzor like the churches of Ulgyur and

Noravank (both associated with the famous 14th c architect Momik) and sites in Areni village receiving signage as part of the “Black Sea Silk Road Corridor” (Black Sea n.d.).

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The narratives of Silk Road connectivity in the Caucasus and Central Asia have also, since the fall of the Soviet Union, figured prominently in ‘soft power’ projects focused on the broad region. In 2011, then-Secretary-of-State Clinton’s Silk Road Strategy aimed at realizing free trade, and thus a proliferation of democratic neoliberal values, in Eurasian states where (it was feared) Islamic fundamentalism threatened to fill the Soviet power vacuum. In the last decade, Central Asia and the post-Soviet states of the Caucasus have become the target of intensifying Chinese ‘soft power,’ which follows the American model in impacting scientific institutions through grants as well as funding infrastructural development for expanded trade (Albert 2018). State and public-private interest in Vayots Dzor and Syunik is thus linked to the strategic geographic significance of the region within international transit development initiatives, specifically the construction of modern trade and travel corridors (highways and railways) connecting Armenia with the Republic of Georgia, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and northern Iran. These projects include the North-South Highway, a high-speed conduit that carries transit trade through Armenia even while carrying tourists with greater speed and ease to previously-remote medieval sites like the monastery at Tatev. Funded by loans from the Asian Development Bank (in which the Chinese state invested \$50 billion upon its founding), the North-South Highway is part of development patterns tied to China’s “One Belt One Road” strategy, which are creating concerns for heritage preservation and local impacts across Eurasia as China constructs the ‘New Silk Road’(Armenpress 2017). Even as increased traffic through southern Armenia has created more attention for sites along the road, the broadening of highway footprints and courting of large-scale development threatens under-studied and poorly

documented archaeological landscapes of all periods. These landscapes under threat include, most ironically, the landscapes of the ancient and medieval Silk Road which demonstrate the long history of Armenian participation in world-scale cultures.

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This is the background and context for both our conceptual work on the Silk Road and on heritage as a potential source of identity and tourist revenues in Armenia. Our research on social landscapes of the medieval Silk Road therefore rides on a double intervention: first, a shift in the politics of knowledge production, or in the ways we make places which become heritage. The second intervention is the opening of new possibilities for stories to tell with the places that we literally make, the sites that we record and map, and the ways that we arrange artifacts and landscapes into narratives about the medieval past. (Insert Fig. 1 near here).

Working with ARISC: seed grants, growing projects

Our experience over the last 4 years working on projects supported by ARISC illustrates the potential for area-based research from ORCs to open possibilities for new approaches to research. By presenting the history of our young project-- the Vayots Dzor Silk Road Survey-- we want to show how potential for new research paradigms can take root in the small niches created by relatively modest support, if grants are designed to reorient or even gently subvert hegemonic ways of doing archaeology. This history is therefore the story of how ARISC provided the space for our working partnership to develop by bringing us together and supporting our ongoing intellectual exchange at critical moments.

Initial collaborations at Ambroyi, Kasakh Valley Armenia

In 2014 K. Franklin began a project following up on her dissertation research in the Kasakh Valley, in Aragatsotn Province of central Armenia. This project, organized in collaboration with Tasha Vorderstrasse of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago and Frina Babayan of the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, was funded in part by an ARISC Junior Research Fellowship. Earlier systematic survey of the valley floor had established an extensive pattern of occupation and monumental construction in this region dating to the high medieval period (AD 13-14th c). This medieval landscape included fortresses, villages and churches, as well as a basilica-form caravanserai or road inn built by a local prince in 1213 AD (Franklin 2014). Data from excavations at the caravanserai provided a partial glimpse of relationships between activities within this ‘Silk Road hotel’ and the people living in villages in the Kasakh Valley. A major challenge to this reconstruction was that no one had ever systematically excavated a medieval village in Armenia before. From the perspective of historical archaeology in Armenia, medieval villages were simply not interesting: they were the bucolic, passive backdrop to the cities, forts and monasteries where all the real action was. Furthermore, archaeologists in the mid century presumed a direct unchanging continuation between medieval village life and modern life in villages. ARISC provided enough support to challenge these assumptions by broadening excavations at the village of Ambroyi (Franklin et al. 2017). Through our excavations at Ambroyi and subsequent synthesis, we pushed back on the prevailing model of medieval society, arguing for the integration of village life and village spaces into both the exchange of culture and the work of politics.

One other critical thing was enabled by the ARISC Junior Research Fellowship in 2014. The third requirement of this grant was “to support a mentoring relationship that will both develop the academic skills of the mentee and strengthen ties between the US and host country.”

Satisfying this aspect of the grant enabled Astghik Babajanyan to join the project and receive a fieldwork stipend-- thus fulfilling the requirements put in place by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography to support their researchers (see Figure 1). While Astghik was nominally receiving training in excavation techniques, the use of a total station, and database building, she put in long hours laying out pottery and explaining medieval vessel forms, types and production techniques. On one of our days off from excavation, we drove to the other side of Mt. Aragats to visit the medieval caravanserai at Talin, contemporary with that near our excavations. Standing under the sun in the enormous court of this ruined Silk Road inn, we talked about the connections between medieval Armenian towns, roads, and the ceramics we had washed and bagged the night before. In the evenings, sitting on the porch looking across the highway at Arai Mountain, we talked more about our ‘dream projects,’ and agreed that we both fantasized about working along the Silk Road in the region of Vayots Dzor, several hours to the south near the Iran border. Vayots Dzor is famous for recent archaeological discoveries, but also for beautiful scenery, fantastic medieval architecture, and Armenia’s best wines. A major challenge was that while Astghik had been told by senior colleagues at the Institute about the dense landscape of medieval sites in that region, no coordinate data or maps of sites existed. At that point, the only people who could do research were the senior members of the Institute who had the resources to visit sites in person, and they had (partially to protect their expertise, partially because of lack of resources) never compiled their site knowledge into a map. We decided that making a map not just of famous attractions but of all the known medieval sites in Vayots Dzor had to be our first task. (Insert Figure 2 near here)

Collaborative Heritage Management in Vayots Dzor

In 2015 we applied for and received a CHMAG for a completely new project in Vayots Dzor, with our base in the village of Aghavnadzor. Vayots Dzor is known both for its astounding Neolithic sites and for the extensive remains of the high middle ages, during which period major routes of trade and travel passed through the region, connecting the Black Sea and Mediterranean to Northern Iran and Central Asia. As mentioned above, Vayots Dzor is entwined within development strategies for infrastructure and tourism. This focus on developing Vayots Dzor for truck and tourist traffic makes the almost completely unresearched nature of its medieval landscapes a major issue, as the pace of development overtakes efforts to preserve vulnerable ancient places. Before the survey we compiled and studied both historical and published scientific sources on the archaeological landscapes of Vayots Dzor. We also took a list of sites and monuments maintained by the Armenian Ministry of Culture (the ՀՀ պատմության և մշակույթի անշարժ հուշարձանների ցանկ, or Armenian Republic Historical and Cultural Immovable Monuments List), which provides rough narrative descriptions of the locations of each site relative to the nearest village (Franklin and Babajanyan forthcoming). As we carried out the survey we quickly realized a number of important challenges related to the List. First, the data given for each site are inconsistent and approximate, making the finding of sites a complex process and the dating of them sometimes circular. Second, the the list of sites is out of date as a management resource, as researchers are slow to share the locations of “their” sites with the management office. As an example, the Areni-1 cave site is now world famous for its in-situ preservation of Neolithic materials and has been excavated since 2007 and widely published, but has not been added to the List. (Insert Figure 3 near here).

We set out to locate and record coordinates for each site, and collect surface materials (usually ceramics but occasionally glass) at as many as possible (see Figures 2-4). Assisted by

graduate student Davit Davtyan, we recorded churches, cemeteries, villages, bridges, fortresses and shrines, drawing on historical geography, local knowledge, and Soviet-era topographic maps

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to find them. This first season had several key outcomes:

1. An online, open source, map-form database of all our located sites, with images and descriptions, free for any student in the Institute-- or any interested local person-- to consult (<https://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/VDSRS>). This database includes a number of sites which are historically significant but which had been clerically 'lost,' their locations known only to a few privileged (senior) archaeologists with access to records and drivers.
2. An assemblage of comparative archaeological materials (diagnostic ceramics) linked to located sites, which would become the foundation of our ongoing research in Vayots Dzor.

As required in the ARISC grant, we presented the results of the first season in a public lecture at the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography. Among the attendees was the Director of the Institute Dr. P. Avetisyan, who pledged future support for the project and a commitment to develop ways of feeding our data back to the offices responsible for monitoring archaeological sites. An extensive public discussion after the lecture focused on the example of the 13th c bridge at Arpa. This bridge represents a significant local medieval investment in the infrastructure of medieval travel and trade, and as such is exemplary of the proud Silk Road tradition that Armenians want to preserve; however, the location of the remaining fragments of the bridge had been lost, to the point that we 'rediscovered' them being used as part of a shed in a private picnic area in Areni. By demonstrating the results of our work

and the immediate free availability of the coordinates, even elder colleagues who were skeptical of the success of this project became interested in collaborative involvement.

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Because ARISC required that our project be collaborative on equal terms, it meant that Astghik was co-director of her own grant project and therefore could organize her work under the framework of the Institute. Under the guise of protecting heritage (something a majority of people supported and were interested in) we could begin to break the monopoly of senior members of the department over knowledge about the locations of archaeological sites and monuments. Thus our collaborative ARISC seed grant allowed us to lay the data foundation for what is now a multi-year project exploring the Silk Road landscape of Vayots Dzor. We have expanded our survey into multiple tributary branches of the Arpa river, and carried out a season of excavations at the medieval town of Arpa (for which the river was named). We began this work in 2016, after Astghik received her PhD degree and thus the right to apply for permits for excavations in her own name. Thanks to the structural intervention of ARISC support, we had gathered sufficient preliminary data on our surveys that we could prepare a permit-- something that would have been much more difficult if Astghik had been trying to do research on her own account while working on her senior colleagues' field projects. The medieval site at Arpa had well preserved living contexts, was a significant station along the transit road, and had been a residence of the Orbelyans, a princely family which looms large in Armenian medieval history. Despite its significance as a nexus of archaeological and historical meanings, Arpa is an endangered monument, inexorably threatened on one side by landslides and on the other by encroachment from the contemporary cemetery. Our excavations at Arpa had two primary foci: first, to study a medieval settlement in the framework of our broader Silk Road research and second, to engage both local people and state organizations over the future of this valuable site.

In our ongoing work we continue to work with multiple, sometimes contradictory goals and desires on the part of locals who want to both preserve their traditions and develop the capacities of Vayots Dzor for national and international tourism. We likewise work between interests at the national level who want to conserve archaeological sites for research (such as our colleagues at the Institute) and development-minded factions who see potential in the Silk Road mystique of Vayots Dzor for more short-sighted development schemes. (Insert Figure 4 near here)

Even as we work to negotiate the multiple claims to the heritage places we have recorded, we also occupy an intellectual space of relative freedom, opened by the support received from ARISC. Our starter *CHMAG* enabled us to start work together on our own terms, and that gave us more control over the questions that we pursued as we got deeper into the project. Our senior colleagues at the Institute were primarily interested in the traditional questions of medieval archaeology in Armenia: where did the princes live and where did they leave inscriptions? Where are the ‘real’ locations associated with textually-attested events like battles? Astghik and I found that, given some space to work, we could ask different questions and focus on what we found interesting: daily life in the town, the construction of household architecture, the detailed variety of ceramic assemblages, and the synchronic relationships between sites in the same valley and with cities further along the Silk Roads. Much of this work is built on our shared interest in medieval ceramic technologies: Astghik specializes in the production techniques and chronology of medieval ceramics in Armenia, while Kate is interested in the role ceramics played in medieval cuisine culture. In 2016 we started a secondary project in collaboration with Dr. Alan Greene, also an ARISC member and grant program alumnus, to carry out a systematic, comparative pXRF analysis of ceramic material from our excavated sites and contemporary 13-14th c contexts all over Armenia. In the framework of her dissertation, Astghik had already

collected ceramic materials from all regions of Armenia, and had noticed that our material collected from Vayots Dzor differed from other regions (Babajanyan 2015). We had first
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proposed the idea for such a comparative project in our dig house in Arai village, while Astghik was being ‘mentored’ on the Ambroyi excavation project. The ongoing capacity of this working collaboration to generate new datasets and new questions demonstrates what can happen when an ORC ‘makes a place’ for people with overlapping interests and skill sets to talk and work together.

Discussion: making places

As junior scholars working on an under-researched time period in a marginal geographical area (as a Christian country in the Caucasus medieval Armenia is not part of the Islamic world but is also not quite Europe), our long-term research goals depend on getting our foot in the door-- in lots of different doors--and in opening a niche for our work to ‘fit.’ Astghik and I have finished or are working on numerous projects which have as a primary aim the generation and publication of enough data to start a conversation, to re-open closed subjects and make a place for a broader investigation. Part of the challenge but also the excitement of working on a new kind of project someplace like Armenia is that almost every aspect of our project questions common knowledge of medieval history and culture, whether of travel routes, patterns of urbanization, or modes of daily life. This brings us back to the double importance of ‘making places.’ On both of our seasons of ARISC funded work we found ourselves literally making medieval places, whether revealing a village hearth in what a senior colleague thought was an empty field, or doing the critical work of listing heritage sites in a way that enables monitoring and protection as well as continued research. (Insert Figure 5 near here)

We also worked through the process of opening disciplinary space. This work was most acutely felt by Astghik, whose position within the social network of the Institute was realigned as a result of her relative independence from what many junior researchers refer to as a ‘feudal’ structure of research relationships. This was not without challenges: Astghik encountered considerable day-to-day frictions as a junior, female scientist who was carrying out funded research without senior patronage, and utilizing new digital tools and techniques in a field which had long relied on narrative history as primary evidence. Our experience demonstrates an intimate aspect of the ‘soft power’ of ORCs. While at the level of research question and publicly disseminated data our project was re-aligning heritage access and narratives, through supporting our project an ORC like ARISC also operates at the level of epistemological politics to enact political shifts almost at a person-to-person basis. We are of course biased, but we see such hyper-localized, feminist interventions in the way knowledge is made as deeply promising for the future of archaeology in the South Caucasus.

Conclusion

By bringing scholars together in local contexts to develop shared questions, ORCs like ARISC make spaces: for conversation, for new methodological approaches, and for developing paradigms of research. This space-making is effective even when, as with the case of ARISC, such spaces are primarily discursive rather than built from bricks and mortar. As we have explored in the context of our experiences in the Republic of Armenia, the making of places is deeply important for archaeology as a social science in (at least) two senses. First, support from ORCs makes a ‘place at the table,’ a discursive opportunity, for new ways of doing science, and for empowering engagements with other stakeholders. These empowering places for voices to be

heard are especially important in the context of heritage, or the ways that archaeological places and things are woven into political narratives of individual, national and global identity. We need to make place for a multiplicity of stories about the Silk Road, an idea which is so easily harnessed to top-down plans for infrastructural development, but which could, alternatively, drive imaginaries of hospitality, of cosmopolitanism and the celebration of local difference. We are aware that this perceived need is part of the political ideology that drives a particular tradition of ‘soft power,’ which now is one of at least 2 “Silk Road Strategies” currently operating in the Caucasus.

As archaeologists we can literally make visible and present the archaeological record and empower both researchers and local people to choose how to relate to or benefit from their rich pasts. The second sense of ‘making place’ refers to the room created by ARISC and other ORCs for junior scholars to let their ideas breathe and expand, not only through financial support but by thoughtful shaping of how that support is directed. Our experience demonstrates the power of small organizations to enact structural change in research institutions at the interpersonal level-- that of scholars sitting together, drinking wine and looking at mountains, and talking about their dreams of the middle ages.

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