

# Photo-excess

Two paradigms of archaeological photography

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## **Abstract**

Discovering ‘photo-excess’: what difference does digital photography bring to the archaeological process, and does this difference constitute a paradigm shift from the traditional film model? Using reflexive practice, the contribution that digital photography has made to the archaeological process is explored. The themes presented in the photographs and exegesis combine visual exploration and original research to examine the role and place of archaeological photography in both a contemporary and an historical context.

In contrasting the development of film-based photography of archaeology undertaken in the Eastern Mediterranean during the early 1900s with contemporary digital photography, this exegesis and creative work explores both the synergies and differences of the two photographic methods in archaeology. I introduce the term ‘photo-excess’ to describe the new role that digital photography plays in archaeological practice as compared to film, and demonstrate this difference through my creative work.

At the turn of the 20th century, photography was affirmed as the major instrument for visual recording of an archaeological excavation. The combination of archaeological methods and photographic techniques from that era formed an approach to archaeological documentation and recording that was formalised by William Matthews Flinders Petrie in 1904. In this thesis I propose that Petrie became the father of modern archaeological photography through his work, and in recognition of his contribution I refer to his method as the ‘Petrie Paradigm’.

Digital photography has made possible a quantum leap in the volume, quality and immediacy of visual data available to the user. Further, through the creative process, digital archaeological photography may provide visual information that exceeds the archaeologist’s original research questions, so that the digital image may sometimes exceed its primary role as a recording device. In such cases it may become the starting point for new research due to its potential photo-excess. I propose this as an emerging paradigm for archaeological photography.

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