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# Bringing Archaeology into Religious and Moral Education: A Case Study from Scotland

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## Abstract

Archaeology provides 'material expression' to the narratives and discourses which construct and bind historical identity. When brought into the classroom it can provide a powerful tool to help school pupils untangle complex structures and meanings, and to begin to develop their own interpretive and evaluative skills. This article explores the use of archaeology in implementing aspects of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. We focus on one subject in particular, Religious and Moral Education (RME), and we analyze one unit of study designed and taught to Secondary 1 and 2 pupils, with ages ranging from 11- 13. We draw upon a recent major excavation in Perth and Kinross in Scotland so as to interrogate the role of symbols in rites of passage surrounding death as these are evidenced in the material record of the human past. We argue that archaeology provided a rich and robust structure, not available via other means, that assisted the development of pupils' higher order thinking skills. We argue that deploying archaeology in RME, and by extension, in other subjects and in different educational contexts, will encourage pupils to explore materiality and will enhance their learning in new and inspiring ways.


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## Introduction

Archaeology as a discipline provides "material expression" (Russell 2006:4) to the narratives and discourses which construct and bind our historical identity. When brought into the classroom it can provide a powerful tool to help pupils untangle those complex meaning structures and begin to develop their own interpretive and evaluative skills. As Anita Synnestvedt argues, interpretation always exceeds the information available; it "can provoke ideas, perhaps even push people into a totally new understanding of what they have come to see" (Synnestvedt 2006:349). And in the current climate saturated with objects, images, and narratives, providing pupils with a hands-on way to make sense of that information is crucial for the development of critical and reflexive thinkers. These skills form key components of the new Scottish curriculum's framework making the inclusion of archaeological methods and materials a fitting and potentially very effective approach across a range of subjects. This article explores the use of archaeology in implementing aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence in relation to one subject in particular: Religious and Moral Education (RME). It analyzes a unit of study designed and taught to S1 and S2 pupils (ranging in age from 11–13; there are six years of secondary school in Scotland: S1–S6) which used a recent major excavation in Perth and Kinross in Scotland as a jumping off point to interrogate the role of symbols in rites of passage surrounding death. The following article is divided into three main

sections: firstly, it provides an overview of both the current Scottish curriculum and role of religious education therein; secondly, it introduces the excavation which acts as the stimulus for the unit of study; and, finally, the article presents the unit of study which sits at the intersection of these two fields. Here, it will be argued, archaeology provided a rich and robust structure in which to develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills and encourage pupils to explore the material culture around them both inside and outside the context of religious education.

## Overview—Scottish Education

The context for our case study is RME as this has been reimagined as part of the revised Scottish curriculum, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), which has been rolled out nationally since 2010–2011 (Education Scotland 2019a). CfE can be seen in terms of a general move away from what came to be regarded as overly prescriptive nationally mandated curricula that were cluttered by content, assessment driven, and intended to be somewhat "teacher proof" (Priestly 2018:897). While Scottish education is still nationally mandated and remains generally uniform across the country (with 95 percent of the pupil population attending state comprehensive schools where traditional subjects still dominate; Bryce and Humes 2018:45), CfE, Mark Priestly contends, has some good "progressive credentials" (Priestly 2018:898). Taken to be part of what Priestly and Gert Biesta (2013) have suggested amounts to something of an international "new curriculum" (a departure in curriculum policy away from "teacher proof" models), CfE is conceived to be learner-centered with a focus on skills development (in contrast to a fact-driven curriculum) with decluttered content and an aspiration to return to a model of teacher autonomy in curriculum development, at least at the level of the school (Priestly 2018:898).

This is not to say that CfE is without its critics, especially in that it is alleged to have retained what is suggested to be technical-instrumental features of previous curricular models, such as the expression of the curriculum in terms of hierarchized learning outcomes, together with a perceived downgrading of knowledge (in favor of skills), amounting to a broad economic instrumentalism. CfE is also not static: there is potential for further curriculum reform which will no doubt bear a degree of political risk following the characterization of it as "excellent" (Priestly 2018:898).

CfE is ambitious in setting out to coherently cover the age range of 3–18 with learners placed at the center of the educational enterprise (the aim of CfE is to develop the "four capacities"—success, confidence, responsibility and effectiveness—in learners). While extending over the full 3–18 age range, CfE is broken down into two parts: the "broad general education" (BGE) phase and the "senior" phase. Our case study was conducted in the BGE phase with S1 and S2 pupils in a nondenominational secondary school. While the senior phase takes place from ages 16–18, S4–S6 in schools, and enables pupils to achieve a range of national qualifications (National 3–5,

Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications), BGE begins in early learning and childcare and extends to the end of S3. During BGE, learning in the eight curriculum areas (expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, mathematics, religious and moral studies, science, social studies, and technologies) is organized in terms of "experiences and outcomes" (Education Scotland 2019b*)* with a set of benchmarks delineating a standard for achievement (Education Scotland 2022).

Religious education has a statutory status in Scottish education (having both nondenominational and Catholic sectors). The experiences and outcomes (summarized below by bullet point) state that learning through what is known variously as "religious and moral education," "religious and moral studies," and RME should enable learners to

- recognize religion to be an important expression of human experience
- learn about and from the beliefs, values, practices, and traditions of Christianity and the world religions selected for study, other traditions, and viewpoints independent of religious belief
- explore and develop knowledge and understanding of religions, recognizing the place of Christianity in the Scottish context
- investigate and understand the responses which religious and nonreligious views can offer to questions about the nature and meaning of life
- recognize and understand religious diversity and the importance of religion in society
- develop respect for others and an understanding of beliefs and practices which are different from one's own
- explore and establish values such as wisdom, justice, compassion, and integrity and engage in the development of and reflection upon one's own moral values
- develop personal beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices through reflection, discovery, and critical evaluation
- develop the skills of reflection, discernment, critical thinking, and deciding how to act when making moral decisions
- make a positive difference to the world by putting one's beliefs and values into action
- establish a firm foundation for lifelong learning, further learning and adult life [Education Scotland 2019c:1].

In practice, teachers will aim to meet these criteria by planning lessons around numbered experiences and outcomes: "Es & Os," as they're known. Teachers will construct lessons that enable pupils to meet established benchmarks by way of these selected Es & Os. So, for example, for E & O RME 2-01a—"Through investigating and reflecting upon biblical and other Christian stories, I can show my understanding of these stories"—a teacher will construct a lesson that embodies the spirit of this E & O such that the following two (summarized) benchmarks are met: the pupil/learner

- Investigates, describes, explains and expresses an opinion on at least one belief from Christianity, at least one World Religion, and at least one belief group independent of religion.
- Discusses ways in which beliefs (including one's own) can affect actions [Education Scotland 2017:9].

Benchmarks are intended to be supportive, "concise and accessible, with sufficient detail to communicate clearly the standards expected for each curriculum level" so that "teachers and other practitioners can draw upon" them in order to "assess the knowledge, understanding, and skills for learning, life and work which children are developing in each curriculum area" (Education Scotland 2017:3). It is within this context that our case study "Bringing Archaeology into Religious and Moral Education" should be understood.

## Excavations at Forteviot

The classroom sessions and activities discussed in this paper as an example of the role that archaeological discoveries and practices can play within schools in Scotland were inspired by internationally significant discoveries made at Forteviot, Perth and Kinross, in 2008–2009. Excavations at Forteviot commenced in 2007 as part of the Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project. This project in the end ran for over a decade investigating the 8,000 years of inhabitation of the neighboring parishes of Forteviot and Dunning in Strathearn (for project overviews, see Driscoll 2010; Driscoll et al. 2010). This was led by the University of Glasgow with various partners and largely funded by Historic Environment Scotland (HES). Publication of the first phase of the project, centered on the small village of Forteviot, took the form of two monographs which are freely available to read online (Brophy and Noble 2020; Campbell and Driscoll 2020), assorted subsidiary publications (some referred to below), and an online exhibition, *The Cradle of Scotland* (University of Glasgow 2015).

The SERF project excavations at Forteviot largely focused on a major complex of cropmarks—that is, buried archaeological traces visible from above as patterns in cereal crops due to the impact subsurface archaeological features had on crop growth rates. First recorded from the air in the 1970s (St Joseph 1976), it became clear in subsequent decades that it was likely that the complex includes a series of enclosures dating to the third millennium BCE (the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods), confirmed by four seasons of fieldwork. Excavations included the investigation of a palisaded enclosure (a circular monument some 250 m in diameter defined by a boundary of large oak posts) dating to 2800–2600 BCE, and two henge monuments, one within, the other outside, this huge enclosure (known as Henge 1 and 2, respectively). These smaller, circular ceremonial earthwork enclosures, with internal ditch, external bank, and single entrance, were constructed in the middle of the third millennium BCE and subsequently converted into burial monuments in the Early Bronze Age. None of these archaeological

sites are visible above the ground surface, all surviving only as negative cut features such as ditches, pits, and postholes.

Henge 1 was explored over two seasons of excavation (2008–2009) in two large overlapping trenches. It was demonstrated that up to 500 years before the henge was constructed, a cremation cemetery was established here (see Noble and Brophy 2017). At least 18 people were buried here, 11 of them adults; several of the burials were of mixed cremated remains, often an adult and child. These people were burned on pyres at unknown locations and laid to rest in a series of pits and hollows, some contained within organic containers such as a wooden bowl or leather bag; bone pins found with some cremated remains suggest that cloaks were worn by the deceased on the pyre. The location was probably marked by a low, round mound and at least one standing stone, and it retained social significance for at least a millennium, as it was enclosed by the palisaded enclosure, a smaller circle of timber posts, and finally the henge monument.

About 10 m from the center of the cremation cemetery and in the southern interior zone of the henge monument, a lavish burial was established in 2100–2000 BCE. This Bronze Age burial became the focus of the teaching sessions discussed below, with results of excavations summarized in Noble and Brophy (2011) and discussed in detail in Brophy and Noble (2020). The grave consisted of a stone cist or coffin made of sandstone slabs set into a large pit that was, in part, dug into the ditch of the henge monument, which by this time had been backfilling with silts for centuries. This cist was capped by a massive sandstone slab that weighed some 4 tons; it had an unusual motif carved onto its underside and was probably quarried from a location 1 km to the south. Within the cist, almost no traces of the corpse survived due to the action of acidic soils. However, a series of grave goods—objects buried with the dead—were recorded and analyzed in the months and years after the excavation by a large team of specialists.

It was clear that the burial had been carefully planned and arranged. The body had been laid on a layer of birch bark, possibly the remains of a stretcher or bier that the deceased was carried to the grave upon. It is likely that the body was laid on its side, with knees drawn up towards the chest, and probably facing to the west (that is, lying on its left-hand side). An arc of quartz pebbles was laid around the head on the southern end of the grave. The person seems to have held an object within their hands, a dagger within an animal skin sheath, with its point aimed towards the chest. The dagger blade was made of bronze (an alloy of copper, probably from Ireland, and tin, from Cornwall) and joined to a horn hilt by rivets. The dagger handle ended with a gold band holding in place a pommel made from the tooth of a sperm whale. Behind the back of the corpse was laid a leather bag containing a small bronze knife and the components of a portable fire-making kit: a flint striker, a lump of yellow iron ore, remnants of horse's hoof fungus, and birch bark. A wooden bowl also sat in this location, while a second bowl, made of

willow, was laid behind the knees. The whole burial was covered in a large quantity of white meadowsweet flowers, evidenced by the survival of most parts of the plant including flowerheads, suggesting the burial took place in late summer.

This remarkable grave contained the first positive evidence for flowers found in a Bronze Age burial in Britain, the most complete Copper Age or Bronze Age fire-making kit found in Europe, and very rare examples of wooden bowls of this age. Within the cist, complex interactions of deteriorating materials appear to have facilitated the unusual survival of some objects such as the flowers, bowls, and bark, but accelerated the decay of the body. Considering parallels from elsewhere, we can surmise that the person buried here was a man (dagger grave context, see Cressey and Sheridan 2003) and probably middle-aged or older (fire-making kit association, see Teather and Chamberlain 2016). The status of this man remains unknown. Conventional archaeological narratives could suggest that he was a leader or warrior, but it could also be argued that materials found in this grave indicate a role as a wise man, shaman, or healer (see discussion in Brophy and Noble 2020:203–205).

The cist was covered by a mound of stones, a cairn, and this seems to be the final major act in this location until a large pit was dug into the henge interior in the 6th–8th century CE, an early medieval venture that may have been related to an attempt to find ancient objects. The stone cairn probably protected the cist dagger burial, but we cannot rule out other Bronze Age burials and Neolithic cremations being disturbed by these medieval explorations (Campbell and Driscoll 2020; Campbell et al. 2019).

The materials found in the cist are now on display in Perth Museum and Art Gallery and can also be viewed online in *The Cradle of Scotland* exhibition. The range of grave goods, the flowers, and the location of this burial mark this as one of the most significant and intriguing prehistoric discoveries ever made in Scotland, with the potential to shed light on things as diverse as social organization, material culture, ritual, power, identity, ideology, belief, and religion some 4000 years ago. It was also clear when the discovery was made that this would have broader outcomes than just the enhancement of the archaeological record.

## Archaeology in RME

The role of religious education in Scotland has undergone profound changes over the past several decades in relation to both core content and overall methodology. As Graeme Nixon has argued, “central to these changes has been the move away from confessional religious instruction towards a faith neutral philosophical approach” (Nixon 2008:8). This has not only meant an increase in the role of philosophy across both BGE and senior phases but also the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches which foreground critical metacognitive skills. The RME curriculum explores a series of complex concepts and belief structures which, without adequate inroads and

appropriate resourcing, can fail to be meaningful and relevant. Bringing archaeology into the Religious and Moral Education classroom and curriculum is not only consistent with these particular educational trends and values but brings with it added benefits for both fields. Approaching belief and practice through archaeological sites and methodologies provides the opportunity for a new level of engagement that not only builds critical evaluative and interpretive skills but also has the potential to challenge the current emphasis on particular skill sets over and above shared bodies of knowledge.

Archaeology as both a body of knowledge and practice has had several different roles within the British education system over the past several decades. The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) developed its Schools Committee in 1975 in order to support teachers and advocate for the subject across the different national curriculums. Its initial aims focused on increasing pupil understanding of the role of the professional archaeologist and the importance of protecting material culture along with improving the depth and consistency of prehistorical and historic teaching across educational settings (Dyer 1983:5–6). This slowly began to expand to encourage a broader understanding of the role archaeology could play across various adjacent subjects, placing equal emphasis on the potential of archaeological education within primary, early secondary school, and senior phases.

The interdisciplinary potential of archaeology in the classroom has been highlighted by practitioners in the United States as well. Since its rise in the mid-1980s, it has been incorporated into subjects as diverse as history, art, and mathematics (O'Rourke et al. 2018; Popson and Selig 2019; Wheeler 2019). It is an "ideal cross-curricular subject" which can "enhance" engagement (Welch and Corbishley 2020:14) and provide a range of opportunities for active, pupil-centered learning. As Jeanne M. Moe argues, "With archaeology, educators can guide the 'uncovering' of knowledge and conceptual understanding by marrying process and content through the study of authentic archaeological data" (Moe 2019:228). That relationship between process and content mirrors the underlying link between belief and behavior that is central to critical engagement with the RME curriculum. Not only does archaeology provide the opportunity for pupils to understand the connections between evidence, context, and interpretation but also "for personal agency in interpreting the archaeological record, rather than relying on historical narratives provided by the experts" (Moe 2019:228). With the roll out of the CfE across Scotland and its emphasis on "flexible, local planning" led by classroom teachers, there is an increased opportunity to bring in a range of innovative pedagogies into teaching and learning to attempt to improve attainment across the board (Brophy et al. 2014; Priestley and Minty 2012:1). As previously stated, many Scottish secondary schools and practitioners have already used CfE to shift their overall emphasis from a narrow focus on religious education onto contemporary moral issues and, as well, incorporate aspects of the senior phase qualifications into the BGE by including units on a range of philosophical fields and debates. Archaeology provides

opportunities for pupil-led “inquiry-based learning” (Moe 2019:228) in all three of these disciplines.

The SERF project provided the perfect opportunity to develop a unit and resources that explored the religious, moral, and philosophical aspects of the RME curriculum within the context of Scottish culture and heritage. The excavation site, range, condition and placement of artifacts, and archaeological context offer numerous potential avenues for investigation as well as links to prehistoric belief structures around death and the afterlife. The unit was designed and taught to four classes across S1 and S2 with students ranging in age from 11 to 13. These classes were chosen because they represented a good cross section of the school’s overall student body and were all mixed ability. Therefore, they could act as case examples before wider implementation into the school’s subject offering. The unit used the sites and artifacts uncovered in Forteviot to explore the role of interpretation in deriving meaning out of material culture. In this sense the unit utilized the field of archaeology in three distinct ways: as a method of investigation, as a theory of knowledge, and as a larger metaphor for the role and construction of cultural narratives. The emphasis here was on a deeper understanding of belief and worship through the investigation of site-specific artifacts, particularly those objects uncovered within the cist feature.

The unit addressed several overlapping curriculum outcomes: “I am increasing my understanding of how people come to have their beliefs, and further developing my awareness that there is a diversity of belief in modern Scotland” (RME 2-09a, Education Scotland 2017:10), “I am developing my understanding of how my own and other people’s beliefs and values affect their actions” (RME 2-09d, Education Scotland 2017:11), and “I am increasing my knowledge and understanding of different forms of worship and artefacts within world religions and can explain their importance for followers of world religions” (RME 2-06a, Education Scotland 2017:11). Pupils in S1 and S2 will be progressing, in most cases, from Level 2 to Level 3 outcomes within the RME benchmarks. This shift relies on pupils being able to not only evidence an increasing level of depth with regards to their knowledge and understanding of particular beliefs and practices but also the level of sophistication with which they can link belief to action and begin to analyze and evaluate their significance in relation to “ultimate questions” as well as the pupil’s own developing beliefs and values (Education Scotland 2017:13–14). It is important here to note that outcomes and benchmarks should be considered and assessed holistically rather than individually (Education Scotland 2017:4). Success within this unit of study was therefore defined through the development of the higher-order skills emphasized in the curriculum document: interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. Pupils would be asked to generate their own hypotheses about the body in the cist through the artifacts found around (what is presumed to be a male) him. These hypotheses would be communicated in the form of narratives. Throughout the unit pupils would be provided with more evidence which they

would then have to use to adjust their initial interpretations. During the final assessment pupils would have to present their conclusions alongside a rationale for how and why they chose to emphasize the importance of particular artifacts and historical evidence over others. Their work would be assessed through the accuracy of artifact descriptions, sophistication of reasoning behind the selection, and complexity of embeddedness within the overall narrative with success evaluated based on the level of pupil progress across Level 2 and 3 benchmarks.

The relationship between evidence, analysis, and narrative is particularly important as a linking mechanism between the two subjects within this unit of study. Narrative is understood here to mean a form of communication that "relates events into a sequence with a beginning, a middle and an end" (Hodder 1995:165), establishing relationships between material evidence, action, and potential belief. It is often highlighted as part of an effective communication and outreach strategy. For example, in Todd J. Kristensen and colleagues' "Grand Challenge No. 5," the authors describe narrative communication as increasing nonspecialist engagement by moving beyond "an enumeration of facts" and focusing instead on the "import behind them" (2020:4). This has the potential to not only target the "imagination" of the audience but also connect past objects and people to the audiences' "own lives, values and decisions" as well (Kristensen et al. 2020:4). Foregrounded here is the role of interpreter as "translator" or "guide" and "go-between" (Hodder and Shanks 1995:5), able to map the past onto the present by incorporating character emotion and intentionality which can help an audience "recognize their humanity" buried within the artifacts (Praetzellis 2014:5136). By emphasising this approach within the classroom pupils are encouraged to explore both sides of the narrative process as audience members and storytellers. This links directly with the underlining methodology running through religious education: to learn *through* rather than just about different cultural beliefs and practices. Narrative allows pupils to reflect on their role in meaning making further concretizing interpretive and analytic skills.

The unit was broken down into several stages which all built incrementally outwards from the introductory lesson. Modeled in part through the stages of David Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), the first lesson was constructed around the reenactment of the initial discovery providing an opportunity for both concrete experience and reflective observation. The purpose of that lesson was twofold. Firstly, to introduce pupils to a working definition of "archaeology" and "archaeologist" by exploring their initial understanding of both terms. Secondly, to provide pupils with the opportunity to engage with images from the original excavation and make their own inferences about the purpose of each object and what it may tell us about the person who was buried there. The central task was a small group carousel activity. Each group member was given a task sheet to fill in as images of six objects from the excavation (including the carved sandstone slab which covered the cist, birch bark, dagger, leather

bag containing fire-making material, meadowsweet flowers, and a wooden bowl) were circulated. With every artifact the student groups had three objectives. They began by trying to ascertain what the object was by analyzing its photo. Once each pupil had written down their idea, the groups were able to turn over each artifact photo to find a series of details about what the archaeologists believed the object may be and what the artifact was made of. After comparing the data to their initial ideas each group was asked to develop a hypothesis about why they thought the object had been found inside the cist. Once all six objects had been examined each pupil constructed their own description about who the person in the cist may have been when he was alive using at least three of the artifacts in order to support their answers. This lesson evidenced each pupil's initial understanding of the purpose of archaeology and the role of the archaeologist as well as their ability to analyze different forms of evidence when interpreting data. It provided a baseline against which to compare pupils' responses and track progress.

The next three lessons examined three of the artifacts more closely in order to introduce a series of new concepts to the pupils: symbol, metaphor, and ritual. In the second and third lesson pupils explored the role of flowers and stone markings as symbolic meaning structures beginning with the Forteviot site and moving through Ancient Greece and the medieval period before ending with contemporary religious and nonreligious practices. These two lessons continued to explore the interpretation of artifacts but with an added level of complexity which emphasized how objects are not only evidence of behavior but also communicate particular belief structures that can be understood in different ways depending on the historical and contemporary narratives that they are embedded within. These two lessons provided opportunities for each pupil to reconsider their original interpretation and begin to work in pairs to evaluate their use of the evidence within their reconstruction of the Forteviot ritual.

In the final stage, prior to assessment, pupils used their evolving understanding of ritual and metaphor to perform some of their own research. Pupils were given the following criteria for their project: find a funeral ritual which incorporated fire in some part of its proceeding. Pupils formed small groups of three and four and were given a series of websites to begin to narrow their search. Once they had found and agreed upon a rite of passage, the group recreated the ritual visually on a sheet of A3 cardstock. Groups had access to a large assortment of materials to build their rituals including molding clay, popsicle sticks, tissue paper, and markers. These creative projects were as varied as the subjects the pupils chose and included Roman funeral pyres, Hindu processions in Varanasi, Viking burial customs, and Native American rites of passage. The objective of this stage of the unit was not only to provide pupils with the opportunity to practice their digital researching skills but also to consolidate previous learning by allowing pupils to apply these abstract concepts to other contexts through creative play and active experimentation before moving to the final individual assessment. When groups

presented their projects to each other they were asked to focus on the role of fire in their ritual. Why choose fire as a central symbol within the rite of passage? What could it tell us about what this group believed about the afterlife? While the depth of reflections varied across the groups, each group was able to isolate fire and define it in relation to the larger belief structure held by the group that they had chosen.

The pupil-led group task provided the last stage of the unit prior to the summative assessment. The assessment asked pupils to reflect on all of the evidence that had been explored across the unit and return to the initial narrative they had developed about the Forteviot man. They were asked to describe what happened to the Forteviot man when he arrived in the afterlife using at least three of the artifacts that we had investigated. An optional starter sentence was given to each class in order to jump-start the writing process. The short story was assessed based on three criteria. The first examined the accuracy of their choice of artifacts. Could pupils not only isolate at least three of the objects that we had found in the Forteviot site but also provide a relevant and accurate description. The second examined how they used those artifacts to develop their own interpretation of the afterlife and ritual. The last assessment criteria focused directly on the structure and style of the story that they wrote. Did they include a beginning, middle, and end which were consistent with one another? Once the pupils had completed their stories and had received written feedback another aspect of the unit was assessed. Every pupil was asked why they chose the particular artifacts that they did. They were asked to respond to this prompt in their workbooks alongside providing feedback on the overall unit. A pupil's response to this final question helped gauge the degree to which the unit had developed and deepened their critical thinking and interpretive skills. Both their short stories and answers were then compared to the first piece of interpretive writing that they had completed at the outset of the unit in order to ascertain the level of progress that each pupil had made across the RME benchmarks.

## Lessons and Implications

Embedding archaeological enquiry into the RME curriculum can provide a performative learning space that directly tackles one of the central pedagogical issues facing teachers of religious, moral, and philosophical education: how do you construct experiences which provide concrete opportunities for young people to reflect on abstract concepts and develop their interpretive skills? Thinking through an archaeological lens allows young people to explore the link between belief and action at the same time as they reflect on the skills they are using to do so.

The Forteviot unit is a good example of this method in action. Pupils were provided with the hands-on opportunity to explore the archaeological method from discovery to analysis in a low-stakes, cooperative space which foregrounded experimentation and creativity. By utilizing narrative and storytelling as a way to

evidence progress across the unit, S1 and S2 pupils were able to tap into skills that they were already developing elsewhere in a way that highlighted the underlining importance of historical narratives within archaeology and cultural studies. Pupils were able to develop their own hypotheses in conversation with the competing narratives already put forward in the field. The qualitative evidence collected throughout the unit highlighted the progress that pupils had made in terms of the skills emphasized within the RME benchmarks. Pupils were able to create links between each object and belief pattern, as well as describe how they came to that conclusion and compare that process to that of an archaeologist, evidencing not only the depth of their subject knowledge but the critical thinking skills that they had been practicing throughout the unit. And while more data will need to be collected to map the long-term impact of the unit on engagement and broader incorporation of reflective skills, this initial case study provides a useful starting point from which to begin to assess the pedagogical potential of archaeology in RME.

Bringing archaeology into the classroom, particularly at the BGE phase, can benefit a range of disciplines for the very reasons explored in the Forteviot unit. Within the humanities, archaeology provides young people with a space to formulate responses through inference and interpretation, which allows them to look back at the past through the perspective of the present. These critical, evidence-based skills are not only central to RME but history and modern studies as well. Archaeology is built on a framework of competing narratives rather than final, correct answers. The plausibility of any interpretation is tied not just to the objects and sites in question but to the historical and cultural forces which construct our interpretive lens in the present. This push and pull duality of the past and present allows young people to engage in nuanced, reflexive interpretations that have the potential to challenge pupils in different ways based on the skills and experiences with which they have entered the lesson or unit. Within the Forteviot unit, this allows the lessons to slowly move away from literal interpretations of grave sites to symbolic readings of them based on the historical and cultural context in which they are embedded. This shift also allows pupils to focus their attention on the mourners and the process of mourning rather than on the dead. The subject of life after death becomes a cultural performance that can be explored from a range of different historical periods and places, as well as interpretive models, allowing the unit to be redesigned for more senior classes as pupils develop a wider depth of understanding and analytic skills.

## Conclusion

Bringing archaeology into the RME classroom offers a variety of benefits for both learners and educators. It allows pupils to not only access but to learn through the act of analyzing and interpreting historical evidence and narratives. This, in turn, concretizes these skills and helps pupils build their confidence when transitioning to more literacy-based forms of analysis and interpretation in the senior phase of RME. The process

also foregrounds a number of interdisciplinary links across the humanities and stem subjects allowing educators to not only highlight the importance of RME within the development of the critical skills that underpin the CfE but also help pupils feel more engaged within their own learning journeys in the BGE phase.

While archaeology as both a field of study and methodology could be used in a number of productive ways inside RME and throughout the humanities, there remains a substantial barrier preventing many practitioners from including it within their curriculum development: a lack of confidence in one's own understanding of the general field and its range of applicability. This often prevents educators from utilizing the resources currently on offer within their wider planning strategies or encourages them to embed particular historical objects within individual tasks without directly incorporating the wider archaeological methodology. Without explicitly developing that link between object and method educators may miss much of the pedagogical potential, especially in relation to an understanding and development of analysis and interpretation. Much work can be done on this front by both researchers and practitioners in the field, including developing resources which foreground process, performativity, and interpretation; encouraging more professional dialogue between educators, cultural theorists, and archaeologists; and embedding archaeology into education degrees. Increased incorporation within the classroom will, of course, not only benefit educators and learners but also the relationship between the public and this field of study, helping to cement a clearer and more nuanced understanding about archaeological research in society more generally.

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