

The Archaeology of Historic Battlefields: A History and Theoretical Development in Conflict Archaeology

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Abstract In the last two and a half decades there have been many advances in the technology available to archaeologists. As new technologies have been used to challenge previously held hypotheses and expand the capabilities of current research, they also have assisted the expansion of archaeology to include conflict archaeology. Although there has been a long history of interest in the material remains of conflict, it is only recently that the necessary tools, methodology, and theoretical approaches have been combined to allow serious scientific contributions to the holistic study of past human conflict. This article provides an overview of the origins of conflict archaeology and research that has helped consolidate the subfield into its present form. We examine the current state of conflict studies and consider what lies ahead for conflict archaeology.

“The history of technology is part and parcel of social history in general. The same is equally true of military history, far too long regarded as a simple matter of tactics and technical differentials. Military history too can only be understood against the wider social background. For as soon as one begins to discuss war and military organization without due regard to the whole social process one is in danger of coming to regard it as a constant, an inevitable feature of international behavior. In other words, if one is unable to regard war as a function of particular forms of social and political organization and particular stages of historical development, one will not be able to conceive of even the possibility of a world without war” (Ellis 1986).

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