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Anticipated futures? Knowing the heritage of drift matter

Póra Pétursdóttir

Department of Archaeology, History, Religious studies and Theology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway

ABSTRACT

What might heritage in and of the Anthropocene look like? This article ponders this question by drawing on archaeological encounters with assemblages of drift matter (seaborne debris) in Norway and Iceland. Here, drift matter manifests evidence of both the relentlessly amassing material heritage of the Anthropocene and deep legacies of local engagement with this fluctuating resource. The tensions evoked along these coastlines therefore invite explorations of some of the challenges met in the current climate, problematizing conceptions of heritage and waste, wanteds and unwanted, salvation and loss. Surely, drift matter is today largely perceived as not belonging in these natural environs. However, are there other thing lessons to be learned from taking seriously this heritage? Avoiding an interpretation of these things as out of context and a focus merely on what has been lost, this article asks whether it is possible that the sense of ambiguity, flux and drift emitted by this material may not only challenge but also enable alternative possibilities of knowing things – alternatives that may be of significance for a heritage in and of the Anthropocene.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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