

## Agamben's Philosophical Archeology: An Historiographical Research Method

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Archeology is traditionally considered to be the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of geographical sites and the analysis of physical artifacts. According to Giorgio Agamben (2008), *philosophical* archeology, on the other hand, is “that practice which in any historical investigation has to do not with origins but with the moment of a phenomenon’s arising and must therefore engage anew the sources and traditions.” In this definition, Agamben alludes to a distinction between the empirical, temporal nature of history in general and the *ahistorical* nature of philosophical thought itself. In this sense, philosophical archeology is a history of conceptual, terminological, thematic, and argumentative networks, in which philosophy encounters its own problems. Agamben’s definition implies the notion of an *ur*-history that pre-dates the phenomenon’s coming-into-being, or what Foucault calls “the moment of arising.” The “moment of arising” may occur objectively in history but it cannot come into one’s purview without the emergence of the knowing subject as well.

In this course, students will focus exclusively on philosophical archeology as an historiographical research method. Agamben’s methodology includes key concepts such as paradigm, signature, potentiality, genealogy, archeology, and *archē*. As Alain De Libera argues, we owe to Kant the notion of philosophical archeology and to Foucault its precise definition, namely, that which renders necessary a certain form of thinking. The course itself begins with Kant and then journey through the writings of Nietzsche, Benjamin, Foucault, and, finally, Agamben. The link between these different thinkers is both the notion of an historical *a priori* and of language’s relationship to the unsayable. Along the way, students will encounter secondary literature that investigates the various junctures between Kant, Foucault, and Agamben. As they rejoin Agamben’s archeological enterprise in the second half of the course, students will also engage with various “philosophies” of history (e.g., Hegel, Benjamin, Collingwood, Ricœur, Adorno, Veyne), as well as Alain de Libera’s archeology of the knowing subject.

Tentative reading list available upon request