Modern Antiquities: Arthur Evans, the Balkans, and the Discovery of a ‘Lost’ European Civilization


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This dissertation employs the career of British archaeologist Arthur Evans as the fulcrum to examine the “modern antiquities” of Europe, by seeking to connect Evans’ more widely known expertise in the Bronze Age Aegean with his experience in the Slavonic Balkans. Previous studies of Evans have focused, for understandable reasons, on the “discovery” on Crete of the Minoans in 1900, which he himself termed “that earliest of European civilizations.”[1] Evans’ first career began in the Balkans in the 1870s and included a five-year residence in Dubrovnik (now in Croatia), while he was journalist writing for the Manchester Guardian. His substantial political involvement in southern Slavonic causes continued after his formal expulsion (for spying) by the Austrians in 1882. Using Evans’ own travel journals, unpublished letters and draft memoranda, and lesser known publications, the dissertation examines how Evans contributed to the construction of a southern Slavonic identity in a multi-tiered way. For example, he perpetuated stereotypes about the ‘barbaric Balkans’ while simultaneously idealizing the Balkan peoples for having ancient world customs; and yet, he supported their modernization efforts when he designed maps of the region based on ancient Roman roads to illustrate the potential train or road routes to improve communication. This dissertation will contribute to regional studies of southeastern Europe and identity studies (gender and ethnicity) by bringing a lesser known aspect of Evans’ career forward. The goal of the project is to understand Evans’ legacy and how he perpetuated a tradition where current popular academic journalism continues to treat the Balkans as on the edge or even beyond the borders of Europe.
