

ations in studying symbolic meanings raise several apparent contradictions. Ethnic boundaries intensify under conditions of increased resource competition...but not always. Females demonstrate more conformity in material culture than males...sometimes. It is a fine balance that Hodder must maintain as he convinces us, on one hand, that meaning is contextually and specifically determined, not to be generalised from one setting to another, while at the same time he conducts ethnoarchaeological research, which perforce must assume at least some analogical correspondences to hold through time. Why, after all, was all the research done in Africa? If meaning must be constituted case by case, the entire structure of Symbols in Action appears curious: many illustrative examples clearly shedding light on something general, rather than a single in-depth ethnographic reconstruction of meanings within one context. What is the larger message, if meanings can't be generalised? Is it nothing but a long and elaborate cautionary tale, telling us only that life is indeed complex? Ultimately, we are left wondering whether these ideas could actually motivate prehistoric research. The slim, sparse treatment of the Orkney example convinces us neither that meanings are uniquely constituted (in fact, this interpretation leans in the other direction, suggesting highly general structural principles at work: oppositions, symmetries, etc.) nor that prehistoric research can expose any cultural meanings at all.

The many reviews that Symbols in Action has already received suggest that consensus is all but formulated on this highly visible volume: here is a strikingly new paradigm, cleverly proposed and clearly presented, but inadequately supported. Again and again, we hear that it is highly provocative and certain to arouse much controversy, inviting us to speculate, then, why

the controversial issues in the book are so assiduously avoided, and the provocations dismissed. If Hodder's book deserves lofty praise, and in many regards it does, this is not because the book is flawlessly executed. Indeed, the fact that the book is fairly riddled with flaws and inconsistencies may even contribute to its attractiveness; here is the design for a significant and exciting departure from the systemic functionalism of the 1960s, but one which still invites our own sympathetic contributions to make it operational. Moreover, the consistent refusal of reviewers to voice highly critical or extreme opinions on its contents suggests that the book is somehow protected by an unspoken sanctimoniousness, as though it is more than what it simply appears to be. It does not seem far-fetched, then, to cast Hodder's book itself as a symbol in action, a boundary-producing ideological flag, which will greatly contribute to defining the direction of archaeology in the 1980s.

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IAN HODDER, The Present Past: An Introduction to Anthropology for Archaeologists. B.T. Batsford, Ltd., London, 1982. 239pp. £14.95 (Hard) ISBN 0-7134-2527-X, £8.95 (Soft) ISBN 0-7134-2493-1.

Reviewed by Valerie Pinsky

The Present Past is an ambitious book whose two main objectives should be considered from two different points of view. On one level, the book attempts to introduce the non-specialist reader to the central issues involved in the archaeological interpretation of material culture, by means of a critical review of the use of ethnographic analogies. Ethnographic data from a variety of sources, including the author's own ethnoarchaeological fieldwork, are marshalled in order to assess the

plausibility of existing analogies, as well as to suggest alternatives; from this last vantage point it compares favourably with Bryony Orme's earlier (1981) volume, *Anthropology for Archaeologists: An Introduction*. On a more theoretical level, however, the book demonstrates the crucial role of analogy and knowledge of the present for any interpretation of the past (the point of the rather intriguing title), and goes further to argue the need for a general theory of material culture. The components of such a theory are outlined from a symbolic, historical and, for Hodder, a critical point of view, as a challenge to the functionalism and evolutionism of much of the New Archaeology. It is at this level that the book is most ambitious and departs so radically from existing discussions about analogy.

As an introduction for the general reader, the book provides a comprehensive (if not altogether clear) summary of the debates about analogy, the history of its use, and the relationships between analogy and ethnoarchaeology (the latter is restricted to an active field method, corresponding to Richard Gould's notion of 'living archaeology', while the former describes the reasoning process involved). This summary draws on widely available published materials, but nevertheless provides a useful background for anyone wishing to pursue the subject further. Hodder has also added a good deal of original theoretical discussion about the proper use and justification of analogy, although the force of his argument gets lost at times because of the loose style in which the book is written. For example, there definitely appears to be a conflict between the 'accessible' style of the book and the not so accessible idea of formal and relational analogies. We are told that archaeologists should employ relational analogies, which depend upon

structural rather than fortuitous or accidental similarities between analogues. Formal analogies are held to be inherently weak, but capable of strengthening by increasing relevant points of similarity while eliminating crucial points of difference, and this is to be achieved by paying more attention to the wider context of analogies. He also points out that relational analogies actually belong on a continuum with the formal kind, but it is not clear from the discussion when, or how, the distinction between the two is actually to be made. In fairness to the reader, a proper grasp of the differences between them would require at least some prior understanding of the issue.

Hodder's review of existing analogies is contained within the seven descriptive chapters which comprise the core of the book. With the exception of one very interesting chapter on the ideology of material culture in a contemporary western context, the review is divided into surprisingly conventional, non-holistic chapter headings such as 'Technology and Production', 'Ritual', and 'Subsistence Strategies'. While this format might be most convenient for the purposes of review, it also partially undermines the general argument of the book, which stresses the importance of treating whole, integrated cultural and social contexts. The actual content of these chapters, however, is more promising than we are led to believe by their titles; Hodder provides a rather extensive although by no means complete survey of ethnographic analogies and generalisations. His object here is to assess, first, whether the analogies are formal or relational, and then to show how they might be improved, either by grading them upwards towards the relational end of the scale, or by considering alternative social and cultural variables, and their contextual

links. In many instances the author simply suggests that alternative, non-functional variables would be more relevant, and advocates more consideration of underlying symbolic processes; in the discussion on the relationships between population and settlement size (pp. 125-6) he correctly identifies the problems with simple correlations based solely on economic and organisational factors, and points out that the symbolic use of space should also be taken into account. In other cases, however, Hodder actually demonstrates the relevance of alternative variables by citing his own research or that of anthropologists; this is particularly true in his review of mortuary data where he stresses the importance of burial norms and attitudes towards death based on African material (pp. 140-141). In the end, however, it must be said that nearly all of Hodder's examples play the role of what John Yellen defined as the 'spoiler' approach; that is, they point up the failure of one set of generalisations and analogies to be acceptable by suggesting the plausibility of alternatives.

The theoretical issues which Hodder raises in this book have been developed more fully in two of his other works (both published earlier in 1982) -- the edited volume, *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, and *Symbols in Action*, although nowhere has he yet articulated a coherent theory of material culture. In response to what he feels is an interpretive deficiency within the New Archaeology, he argues the need for a generalising, symbolic theory, which is rooted in analysis of the particular historical context of society. The search for cross-cultural regularities which features so highly within contemporary processual approaches is seen to be merely scratching the surface; archaeologists should endeavour to discover the deeper structural links between variables and the reasons ('rules') why they

occur, and only then will they be able to assess the relevance of their analogies and knowledge of the present for the past. The idea of relevance is crucial for Hodder's argument in at least two ways. First, it is considered to be the prime criterion by which statements about the past, and the meaning of material culture generally, are to be evaluated. This stands in marked contrast to the empiricist testing methodology of much of the New Archaeology, which is based on the mistaken assumption that archaeologists can conclusively test their hypotheses using the Hypothetico-Deductive method, either by proof or by falsification. Hodder's claim here is that even the predictions made to test hypotheses are inconclusive, since they are based on further untested (and in most instances, untestable) assumptions about what sort of evidence should bear out a particular prediction. This seemingly sceptical conclusion, however, does not suggest to him that archaeology cannot be a rigorous discipline which achieves a high degree of likelihood in its findings; on the contrary, he feels this is precisely what should result from a proper appreciation of relevant context. The second way in which the idea of relevance is crucial is in Hodder's belief that a 'rigorous' archaeology is also one which must be 'self-aware', or critical. By this he means that interpretation of material culture in meaningful, symbolic and ideological terms should be undertaken in order to balance existing interpretive bias towards functionalist and utilitarian approaches; these are regarded as cultural preconceptions derived from our own modern, western and middle class experience and are little more than ethnocentric prejudice. A relevant approach would thus be one which also has the ability to filter out the archaeologist's perspective in favour of an internally meaningful, emic cultural framework; that is, a

framework based on the cultural rules of the object of study.

Although the marriage of the general and the theoretical is not entirely happy in The Present Past, the book can be recommended for its fairly complete and detailed treatment of the problem of interpretation by analogy. Those readers who wish to explore the substantive implications of a symbolic theory of material culture will unfortunately have to wait, though they have quite a lot to look forward to.

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DAVID PEACOCK, Pottery in the Roman World: An Ethnoarchaeological Approach. Longman Archaeological Series, London, 1982. 192pp. £14.94 (Hard) ISBN 0-582-49127-4.

Reviewed by James McVicar

A reviewer can always discuss a new publication by highlighting its general strengths and weaknesses and offering an overall appreciation, but there are some cases where a more detailed comment is in order. Peacock's latest book is such a case. I pass over, then, much that is fine in the volume in favour of a discussion of its stated theme (an ethnoarchaeological approach to ceramics) and method (the use of ethnographic 'models'). Undoubtedly the archaeological evidence presented will be reviewed elsewhere and by those more qualified to do so than myself.

Pottery in the Roman World is intended as an introduction to the application of ethnoarchaeology to the study of ceramics in general, and to Roman ceramics in particular. As such, one would expect a detached and balanced approach to the subject; unfortunately, this is not the case. A glance through the bibliography suggests that little account has been taken of

recent criticisms of the perspective which Peacock, amongst others, has adopted, or of the debate over the role of analogy and cross-cultural generalisations in the interpretation of archaeological data. Ethnoarchaeology encompasses a variety of different, often mutually exclusive, approaches to the use of ethnography, and is beset by problems which cannot be dismissed as lightly as Peacock suggests. Furthermore, while it is true that controversies such as the formalist-substantivist debate have involved misunderstanding on both sides, the arguments of substantivist economics cannot be readily ignored or assimilated, and Peacock does not address them by misaimed attacks on Polanyi (p. 81). An adequate discussion of such matters is essential to any serious attempt to use ethnographic data; and while it is not, perhaps, surprising that one should pass over or dismiss out of hand ideas which call one's whole project into doubt, this is less excusable in an introductory text which should not be polemical.

The approach to ethnoarchaeology which Peacock has adopted is not unknown, and a similar perspective underlies van der Leeuw's recent work (see in this issue). It is founded on the idea that by understanding the kinds of archaeological record created by different economic and social systems it is possible to make necessary inferences about the economic and social conditions associated with a particular archaeological dataset. This consequently involves a classificatory and generalising approach to ethnographic data, and Peacock's work illustrates this well. Thus the book sets out by organising pottery production into a series of 'modes' and then by finding a set of ethnographically documented societies which can be classified in these terms and which illustrate the range of diversity which is expected. The procedure