

THE IMPACT OF THE CONCEPTS OF TIME AND PAST ON THE CONCEPT OF
ARCHAEOLOGY: SOME LESSONS FROM THE REBURIAL ISSUE

Larry J. Zimmerman

Archaeologists view the world in a singular and perhaps peculiar way. As Loren Eiseley eloquently phrased it in his book Night Country:

A man who has once looked with the archaeological eye will never quite see normally again. He will be wounded by what other men call trifles. It is possible to refine the sense of time until an old shoe in the bunch of grass or a pile of nineteenth-century beer bottles in an abandoned mining town tolls in one's head like a hall clock. This is the price one pays for learning to read time from surfaces other than an illuminated dial. It is the melancholy secret of the artifact, the humanly touched thing (Eiseley 1971, 81).

That "melancholy secret of the artifact", as Eiseley seems to intimate, has much to do with how we apparently view time and the past, a view which may be different from that of non-archaeologists.

As archaeologists, I believe that we only have a limited comprehension that others see time in very different ways. Time and the past are a part of a professional ideological structure that seems very natural to us (cf. Leone 1978, 27). From a more objective perspective, we do recognize that the passage of time depends on situation and mood, and we know that the past is a construct built from the present, dependent on our own society's concept of time and space. But, as Leone (1978, 25) has observed, we rarely ask how past and present societies conceived these dimensions and we never ask how our own definitions of time and past influence our interpretations of other societies.

At the 1983 Plains Conference a discussion was held between archaeologists and several Sioux (Lakota) holy men and elders. In response to a question posed by an Indian about why we do archaeology, an archaeologist responded:

I think we can see a conflict between two value systems where you would rather see the burials left untouched and we have an innate curiosity about the past. Well, we consider it innate; perhaps it's something we are raised with, and we have a hard struggle overcoming the curiosity about understanding the past -- our past, your past. I see some conflict in value systems... (Hammil and Zimmerman 1984, 9).

Part of the statement is correct. There is certainly conflict between value systems. But the conflict is not simply over archaeologists being innately curious about the past and the Indians not being curious. And, very importantly, it is certainly not about the degree of curiosity, as the archaeologist implied, over the same past. More correctly, part of the archaeologist's statement should have been taken literally: our past your past. The two pasts are most different, a difference we have generally failed to understand.

Not only do we little understand how we view time and past as a profession, but we also fail to understand how our views cause others to see us, and the impact their view of us can have on archaeology. Nowhere has this become more clear than in an examination of the reburial issue in North America where indigenous groups are demanding the return of ancestral skeletal material and associated grave goods. Many Indians, in fact, have demanded that archaeologists stop the excavation and study of mortuary sites altogether.

In this paper, I will examine how I believe many Native Americans view time and past and consequently how they view archaeology and its practitioners. When contrasted with archaeological concepts of time and past, what I hope will emerge is a demonstration of the ideological potency of what many archaeologists would think to be very simple concepts. The pasts we construct are not pasts in which Native Americans have any great confidence because they represent an ideological construct of a society and profession seen as exploitative, and which many see as potentially destructive to their world. Our failure to understand the differences has put us in the uneasy position of being scientific 'colonialists' who are 'grave-robbers'.

'Indian Time' and the Past

When I first met ninety-year-old Lakota Elder Matthew King immediately before the Plains Conference session on reburial, he referred to the problems Indians were facing with treatment of human skeletons. He said something puzzling: "This has bothered me for 500 years". During the session, he also made a statement that "according to scientists we've lived here 33 million years and the Indians themselves said they lived here for over millions of years" (Hammil and Zimmerman 1984, 2). Such numbers to an archaeologist like me seemed ridiculous, and my colleagues in the audience politely listened to what we thought to be the 'ramblings' of an old man. But when, at the 1984 Peacekeeper Reburial Conference, he said, in referring to problems Indians have suffered, "This has been building up inside me for 500 years", understanding began. What I began to see was part of his world view, a world view that had a very different perception and use of 'time' and 'the past' from mine as an archaeologist. From that incipient understanding, some of the problems of communication about the reburial issue faced by Indians and archaeologists became clear to me. We simply didn't see time and the past in the same way. Since then, more careful study (Zimmerman 1986; Watson, Zimmerman and Peterson 1987) has suggested

something of an understanding of Native American concepts of time and past.

Conceptually and pragmatically, for the Indian, the past lives in the present. Traditionally oriented Indians view the present as the only 'real' event. Past events may provide exemplars for present action, but as human nature does not change, the situation is only different as to its observable factors such as people involved and locations. Therefore, the past is the present (cf. Lowenthal, 1985 xv). Indians know the past because it is spiritually and ritually a part of their daily existence. And, it is relevant only as it exists in the present. A specific future is unknown and, therefore, of little immediate concern except that for a future to occur, time must be renewed by proper ritual adherence to natural law. The past and present are not separate but are in a continuous process of becoming. The past is a unifying, spiritual 'knowledge' which is not and cannot be constrained by the passage of days, months or other man-made versions of time.

This is not to say that Indians had no view of chronology or deliberately tried to avoid it. Deloria (1973, 112) uses the example of the winter count of Plains groups to document specific sequences of time to remember a community's immediate past experiences. But as he notes, one could not find a very accurate concept of history in winter counts because continuous subject matter seldom appeared. Other groups in other culture areas had similar methods, but "lacking a sense of rigid chronology, most tribal religions did not base their validity on any specific incident dividing man's time experience in a before and after" (Deloria 1973, 113).

Martin (1987), using Eliade's (1985) Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, does an excellent job of presenting the concept. The kind of time in operation here is eternal, cyclical, endlessly repetitive, powered by Nature and cosmology (Martin 1987, 194). It is sacred, with traditional peoples seeing it as periodically regenerating itself ad infinitum (Eliade 1985, 112). Truths were revealed in mythical times, specifically at creation. "These tremendous events that occurred at the beginning of time" comprised "all the important acts of life...revealed by gods" (Eliade 1985, viii, 32). They effectively become natural law. The aim is thus to arrange one's life so that these sacred acts can be experienced as often as possible. By executing an act as it was done originally, with the ritual passed down faithfully from generation to generation, one can actually project oneself into that "same primordial mythical moment" (Eliade 1985, 35).

Nowhere in the various reburial transcripts is this concept better presented than it was by Southern Cheyenne Viola Hatch at the Peace-keeper Conference:

We do not have a set of guidelines written on a piece of paper to show us how to live. We got it from the great Spirit. He told us one time, we learned it, followed it to this day (USAF 1985, 58).

At an earlier Plains conference, Matthew King said much the same thing:

Let the People sleep in peace. It is a burial ground and also a church for our Indian people. We cannot change it, because God give us this country and he give us the laws to govern our people. We cannot change it. No one can change it. We cannot make laws (Hamil and Zimmerman 1984, 4).

These approaches to time are fundamentally supported by primary orality, the nearly complete emphasis on the spoken word by traditional cultures. For cultures which maintain the vestiges of primary orality, as most Native Americans do, "learning" or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known" (Ong 1982, 45) and "word meanings come continuously out of the present, though past meanings of course have shaped the present meaning in many and varied ways, no longer recognized" (Ong 1982, 47). Though the past is recognised and important, its relevance to the present is determined by what is happening now. "The word in its natural, oral habitat is a part of a real existential present" (Ong 1982, 101) and "sound better represents another world, of dynamism, action and being-in-time..." (Ong 1977, 136). In other words, oral tradition or history recounts the mythic and makes the past and present the same. What this frequently translates into is a complete lack of trust and perhaps even disinterest concerning what archaeologists do and the histories they build. Because the past is known, it does not have to be discovered and the knowledge or information from archaeology and other sources holds little meaning, and may even be cause for suspicion and fear.

Esther Stutzman, a Coos Indian, effectively phrases the differences in approach to knowing the past (Ross and Stutzman 1984, 6): "The past is obvious to the Indian people, as it does not appear to be obvious to the white man". Cecil Antone of the Gila River Indian Tribes elaborates:

My ancestors, relatives, grandmother, so on down the line, they tell you about the history of our people and it's passed on and basically, what I'm trying to say, I guess, is that archaeology don't mean nothing. We just accept it, not accept archaeology, but accept the way our past has been established and just keep on trying to live the same style, however old it is (Quick 1986, 103).

When asked by an archaeologist if he learned from the past, Lakota holy man Roger Byrd responded:

[f]rom my own culture, yes. And I learn and I use it today and I'll use it tomorrow. But I cannot see where, you know, I cannot go back and dig up my people and look at their bones and use that. It just don't make any sense (Hamil and Zimmerman 1984, 16).

Finally, the attitude towards discovery of the past is well summarised by Ernie Turner, an Athabaskan. He says:

Human bones are not able to talk to the scientists and leave them information. Culture talks to us and gives us messages from the past. Spiritual communication is not a theory, it is a fact. I am not sure what the bones can tell [the archaeologists] of the spiritual beliefs of my people. Even if the bones do communicate, I'm not sure what they tell you is true (Anderson *et al.* 1983, 28).

Such suspicion is common and stems from a distrust of an essentially different view of time and the past among archaeologists.

Archaeological Time

Archaeological time is fundamentally a Euroamerican and literalist approach to time which fits what Littlejohn (1983) describes as rationalist and empiricist traditions. Of central importance is our division of time into past, present and future. Leone (1978, 28) suggests that the construction of times apart from the present moment stems from the construction of a dual world. That dual world consists of the present which is direct and immediate and another world which is not so available, but a view of which is well articulated and which is distinct from here and now. Thus, a segmented view of the past with two 'other worlds', the past and future, emerged. Such a view may have developed, he notes, from a cultural shift toward hierarchical, multiclass social structures. Emphasis is placed on objectivity and trained observation as prerequisites to discovering eternal reality with a goal of making lawful statements about reality that hold true across time and all human events. This goal is pursued by analysing component parts and sub-parts of a phenomenon and seeking causal, mechanistic explanations for it. Time thus becomes a past, present and future in which events are linked in a linear fashion. The present, viewed as the link between past and future, is the least significant of the three time events (I would offer as an archaeological example the title of David Thomas' [1974] text Predicting the Past).

The past must be discovered, largely through written sources and archaeological exploration and interpretation. From that past one may learn or discern what actions should be taken in the present to obtain desired effects in the future. What happened in the past is interpreted through the hindsight of the present and, therefore, becomes an "artefact of the present" (Lowenthal 1985, xvi). When written, the past becomes a "fixed, unalterable, indelibly recorded" entity unto itself. The sequence of events generated thus "come to be a justification for validating and exalting the present" (Lowenthal 1985, xvi). This becomes value-laden in archaeology when more modern or complex becomes equated with better. Thus a notion of progress becomes inextricably linked to the archaeological record and to archaeology's historical view of the Indian (see Trigger 1986 for an excellent discussion). We see no

way of knowing the past except to excavate, to analyse, to place events into sequences, and then to draw meaning from them. Clement Meighan, an outspoken opponent of reburial, characterises the approach as follows:

The archaeologist is defining the culture of an extinct group and in presenting his research he [sic] is writing a chapter of human history that cannot be written except from archaeological investigation. If archaeology is not done, the ancient people remain without a history and without a record of their existence. Do these people deserve a chapter in the book of human cultural development? (Meighan 1985, 20).

Meighan's view is typical of archaeological approaches to time and the past found in any archaeology text. The past and present are related in a linear fashion, with historical retrospection and 'periods', 'phases' and 'traditions' serving as conceptual and linguistic partitions. Developments begin and end, and events in between follow in a linear fashion. The approach is intellectual, with the past evident in the study of remains recovered by excavation and analysis (Watson *et al.* 1987).

Thus, in a sense, archaeologists apparently see the past as being 'lost' if not archaeologically investigated. This view leads to conflict with Indians. In his book *God is Red*, Vine Deloria Jr. (1973, 33) noted that when a group of American Indian Movement militants disrupted a dig in Minnesota in 1971, an archaeology student was heard to say "(w)e were trying to preserve their culture, not destroy it".

A recent article on repatriation of Indian tribal sacred objects and human skeletons held in museums, includes a comment on Indian demands by the chairperson of the Society for American Archaeology Committee on Native American Relations (Floyd 1985, 22). She is quoted as saying, "...it's good that Indians are starting to care about their pasts". The implication of her remark is that at least some of the past lies with the artefacts themselves and the Indians have not cared about them, and thus do not care about the past.

Archaeology, though the discipline is by and large formed by a heritage that says that discovery is the key to knowing the past, has recently begun to question that assumption. As Miller and Tilley (1984, 3) recognise, "archaeology may be held to tend toward 'fetishism': this idea as used in critical approaches suggests that relationships between people may be represented as though they were relationships between objects". This fetishism has been crucial in Indian rejection of our view of the past.

In a conversation about Indian literature, Vine Deloria, Jr. (1977) critiques Euroamerican approaches to history. He seems to view history and archaeology as a theoretical 'house of cards' built on evolutionary theory in which objects or events, but not people, are put into chronologies, with meaning somehow drawn from the chronology. Indians, he

says, focused on people and how they experienced their lives. They know what their lives mean.

What We Are Really Telling the Indians

As archaeologists we communicate very badly with Indians even though many of us supposedly have training in understanding other cultures. There can be little doubt that communication barriers exist between archaeologists and Native Americans based on differences in their perception of time and the past. One need only look to the semantic confusion which might be caused by such differences to understand why, in some cases, there has been only limited resolution of the reburial issue. When examined through an Indian primary oralist world view, arguments made by archaeologists that reburial should only occur when there is a demonstrated genetic relationship or cultural affiliation between the bones and present day groups are meaningless and perhaps insulting to Native Americans (cf. Meyer 1985). Likewise, statements by archaeologists that the study of prehistoric human skeletons will somehow help contemporary Indians in the future also become meaningless. Many Indians even go so far, when trying to understand this approach from our view, of rightfully asking for specific examples (and only rarely finding them). Arguments made about religion or spirituality vs. science are simply not understood.

If the past lives in the present for Indians and does not exist as a separate entity, archaeologists stating that the past is gone or 'extinct' send a strong (though unintentional) racist message to the Native Americans to the effect that the latter themselves are extinct. Acceptance of the past, as archaeologists view it, would actually destroy the present for Indians. But if the past is the present, excavated human remains are not devoid of personality and must be respected as the living person should be respected. The archaeologist, by developing and using laws to deal with the remains, is actually showing disrespect for the person that is the remains, and for the contemporary Native American. By accepting the archaeologists' view of time or the past, the Indians, to paraphrase Ong (1982, 15), would have to die to continue living. Deloria effectively summarises the dilemma when he says, "(t)he tragedy of America's Indians...is that they no longer exist, except in the pages of books" (Deloria 1973, 49).

Impacts on Archaeology

The conflict of world views certainly comprises other issues than views of time and past (land rights, for example). If resolution and compromise between the groups is to be possible, further analysis of arguments made by both sides is required. In the end, because archaeologists are anthropologists, and anthropologists attempt to understand world view and its resulting human behaviours, archaeologists will have to be more flexible in their dealings with Native Americans about the reburial issue. This will confront archaeologists with a paradox similar to that of the Indians in relation to time and the past. An expressed ethic which demands protection of the people being studied

will conflict with the archaeologists' own data needs and may dictate change in views of the past.

Two dangers stand out. As archaeologists we do have a right to our own view of time and the pasts we reconstruct. We cannot abandon our own views of the past in favour of some other group's. Their view is not our view and some sort of hybrid view, a combination of their view and ours will probably have little meaning to either them or us. This is not to say that we must be adamant about preserving all materials we excavate, nor does it mean that at some future time a hybrid view of the past cannot have meaning. Following Lowenthal (1985, 410), preservation itself reveals that permanence is an illusion. He notes:

The more we save, the more we become aware that such remains are continually altered and reinterpreted. We suspend their erosion only to transform them in other ways. And saviours of the past change it no less than iconoclasts bent on its destruction (Lowenthal 1985, 410).

The second danger is more immediate and much less opaque. In North America, the general public feels far greater emotional kinship with Native Americans than with archaeologists. Many express feelings about the sacredness of the 'ancestors' very similar to those of Indians. At the time of this writing, the United States Congress is considering passage of a law which may essentially force repatriation of human remains and sacred objects. If the law takes effect, we will certainly see changes in the way we create the past. The fault will not be that of Indians, but rather our own because of our failure to understand and admit that time and past can have meanings other than those we accept.

References

- Anderson, D., Ziegler, D. and Schermer, S. 1983. The Study of Ancient Skeletal Remains in Iowa: A Symposium. Iowa City, Office of the State Archaeologist.
- Deloria, V. 1973. God is Red. New York, Delta.
- Deloria, V. 1977. A conversation with Vine Deloria, Jr. Words and Place Program 8. New York, Clearwater.
- Eiseley, L. 1971. The Night Country. New York, Charles Scribner.
- Eliade, M. 1985. Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return. New York, Garland.
- Floyd, C. 1985. The repatriation blues. History News 40, 6-12.
- Hammil, J. and Zimmerman, L.J. 1984. Reburial of Human Skeletal Remains: Perspectives from Lakota Spiritual Men and Elders. Indianapolis, American Indians Against Desecration.
- Leone, M.P. 1978. Time in American archaeology. In Redman, C., Langhorne, W., Berman, M., Versaggi, N., Curtin, E. and Wasner, J. (eds.) Social Archaeology: Beyond Subsistence and Dating. New York, Academic Press, 25-36.

- Littlejohn, S.W. 1983. Theories of Human Communication. Belmont, Wandsworth.
- Lowenthal, D. 1985. The Past is a Foreign Country. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, C. 1987. Epilogue: time and the American Indian. In Martin, C. (ed.) The American Indian and the Problem of History. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 192-220.
- Meighan, C.W. 1985. Archaeology and anthropological ethics. Anthropology Newsletter 26(9), 20.
- Meyer, L. 1985. Philosophical problems in the conflict over sacred sites and objects. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington DC.
- Miller, D. and Tilley, C. 1984. Ideology, power and prehistory: an introduction. In Miller, D. and Tilley, C. (eds) Ideology, Power and Prehistory. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1-15.
- Ong, W.J. 1977. Interfaces of the World: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Ong, W.J. 1982. Orality and Literacy: The Technologising of the Word. London, Methuen.
- Quick, P. 1986. Proceedings: Conference on Reburial Issues, Newberry Library, Chicago, June 14-15, 1985. Washington DC., Society for American Archaeology.
- Ross, R.E. and Stutzman, E. 1984. Two views of archaeology. Paper presented at the 49th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Portland, Oregon.
- Thomas, D.H. 1974. Predicting the Past: An Introduction to Anthropological Archaeology. New York, Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.
- Trigger, B. 1976. Prehistoric archaeology and American society. In Meltzer, D., Fowler, D. and Sabloff, J. (eds.) American Archaeology Past and Future: A Celebration of the Society for American Archaeology, 1935-1985. Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 187-215.
- United States Air Force. 1985. Conference on Reburial. Norton Air Force Base, CA, USAF.
- Watson, N., Zimmerman, L.J. n.d. Human bones as symbols of power: aboriginal American belief systems toward bones and "grave-robbing" archaeologists. In Layton, R. (ed.) Who Needs the Past? Indigenous Values and Archaeology. London, Allen and Unwin. Forthcoming.

TEMPORAL AND SOCIAL SCALES IN PREHISPANIC MESOAMERICA

Olivier de Montmollin

Bailey has noted that "past behaviour...represents an amalgamation and intersection of many different processes operating over different time spans..." (1983, 166-167). As a general rule, 'internalist' (social) approaches have focused on short-term process; this, however, is not inevitable, as social phenomena may be shown to have a temporal hierarchy (Bailey 1981, 105; 1983, 180-1). In this paper I examine various social temporalities, involving prehispanic Mesoamerican spatial scales, social scales, and both etic and emic time scales (Table 1). The theme selected for special attention here is time management at household and polity scales. To fully explore this theme both etic and emic time scales are considered.

Time Management at the Household Scale

Time Allocation [TA] study is one form of etic analysis that has been applied to 'home economics' and time budgets at the household scale, involving fairly short daily, seasonal or yearly time-spans (Gross 1984). A prominent Mesoamerican example concerns a Late Formative shift to ceramic (and other craft) specialisation in Oaxaca, in which it is proposed that a change from a single crop (wet season) to a two-crop (wet and dry season) irrigation regime caused a re-ordering of familial time-budgets, and cost-benefit calculations leading to household specialisation in either agriculture or crafts (Blanton et al. 1982, 22-23; 1981, 27; Feinman 1986).

Conceptual differences exist between 'maximisation' models (Blanton and Feinman, above) and 'satisfier' models (Flannery and Marcus 1976, 376-377) in analysis of commoner household time management. Maximisation models, using principles similar to those of microeconomics, fall within a formalist anthropological economics (Halpern 1985). Satisfier models are more closely constructed from Mesoamerican ethnographic studies (eg. informant statements about Zapotec family farming strategies and views of nature). Accompanying general principles of risk minimisation, an ideological framework stressing an "image of limited good" (Foster 1965) makes satisfier models more similar to substantivist anthropological economics (Halpern 1984).

Household economics may be related to a general anthropological model -- Sahlins' Domestic Mode of Production [DMP] (1972, ch. 2-3). Sahlins uses concepts from rural sociology (Chayanov) to extend the temporal dimension of householding into a multi-generation domestic cycle (Goody 1962). The idea is that time-use decisions in a peasant (or any DMP) household vary at any given moment according to the family's proportion of producers to non-producers, which in turn depends