

Archaeological Production in a Political Context

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In the period since the Second World War, the changing political and economic circumstances experienced by the industrialised countries of Western Europe have led to the development of a new set of relationships between the various metropolises and their ex-colonies. In the realm of the social sciences, including Archaeology, this has led in part to the appearance and growth of new thought trends which challenge orthodox metropolitan scientific norms, and to the breaking up of the positivist "quarantine" which recognises only apolitical scientific practice. In the words of David Clarke, who wrote in a different context: "From the Antipodes to Africa the old regionally self-centred 'colonial' concepts are severely challenged and their weaknesses gravely exposed in the wider general debate" (Clarke 1973:7). The recent discussion and coverage of a number of different national approaches to archaeology in two issues of World Archaeology (Trigger and Glover 1982) underline these developments. In turn, these widespread changes seem to have led to reassessments of the fundamental philosophical and methodological positions which govern the production of archaeological knowledge. Current examples of this trend in the Anglo-American frame of reference include the work of Leone (1982 a,b), and the Cambridge Seminar Group (Hodder 1982). Interest in development archaeology which complements and extends concern with cultural resource management programmes has been stimulated by Miller (1980), and some other positions are noted in Sinclair (forthcoming b).

The variety of the differing approaches to archaeology, each influenced by differing historical, ideological, political and economic circumstances, is extensive (Klejn 1977). For example, even within the relative ideological cohesion of Soviet archaeology a number of differing tendencies of archaeology exist (Bulkin et al. 1982) within an overall dialectical materialist tradition. This both contrasts with and complements the variety of approaches within an eclectic Western framework.

Still, there seems no global common denominator of archaeological practice in the form alluded to by Turner (1975) for anthropology. Rather, as pointed out by Asad (1973), specific circumstances dictate the interplay between differing forms of rationality and metropolitan norms. The many faceted struggle taking place in different parts of the Third World to establish equitable national, provincial and local frames of reference on the ideological level also has its repercussions for archaeological production. These struggles often take place in the face of military aggression and within an historical context of imperialist economic and cultural exploitation. In such circumstances archaeological production can be seen as one means of constructing a national identity and asserting cultural values in the face of a dehumanisation process. A complex mosaic of differing class interests have imposed differing aims upon the archaeologies of the 'Three

Worlds'. This is especially apparent when the combination of material and social factors which govern archaeological production are considered. Differential access to financial means, training and analytical facilities, and the new technology coupled with neo-colonial intellectual dependence and continuation of colonial ways of organising and targeting archaeological production reinforce this situation.

The eastern and southern African context with its immense cultural succession and its series of imperial, colonial, neo-colonial nationalist and liberationist approaches to archaeology provides some illustrative examples of the above points. Without doubt the most striking changes in the region since 1945 have been brought about by the decolonisation process which in the case of Southern Africa is still ongoing. In the different countries of the region decolonisation has resulted in varying degrees of disengagement from the metropolises.

At the TILLMAP symposium in Nairobi in 1979 to which archaeologists from six eastern and central African countries were invited, an encouraging level of agreement on the importance of establishing national priorities and in considering the relevance of development archaeology for the education systems of the various countries was reached between participants of widely differing ideological position. This resulted in a number of recommendations at the national level for the practice of archaeology in the various countries and also some suggestions for foreign research bodies to support moves towards the even development of the different periods of the archaeological record for educational purposes and to assist in training national archaeologists.

The distinction between appropriation from the means of historical production or contribution towards this capacity by foreign researchers, at the international, national, provincial and local levels is keenly felt in Eastern and Central Africa. It is quite possible for projects successful at one of these levels to be the cause of conflicts at another. As a result of these discussions, the crucial point appears to have been established that archaeology does have an important role to play as part of a development process, in establishing an historical identity from the international to the local level.

A first step in the necessary reassessment of the colonial contribution to archaeology in the region was accomplished by the various authors contributing to the TILLMAP workshop in 1979. The situation in Mocimbeque is covered in a collective paper by Sarq (1980) and Sinclair (forthcoming) and Morais (forthcoming) and for Zimbabwe by Garland (1982). In addition, Derricourt (1982) and Ray (forthcoming) have underlined the tendency for colonial archaeologists to concentrate on particular chronological periods.

There is also an increasing awareness amongst archaeologists on the ideological role of archaeology in relation to the ongoing liberation struggle in Southern Africa. The elaboration and promulgation of racist

myths concerning the origin of the Zimbabwe state which led ultimately to the censorship of archaeology by the Smith regime in then Rhodesia is well documented (Garlake 1973, 1982; Morais, forthcoming; Sinclair, forthcoming b).

Comparable myths in South Africa which assert that European settlers occupied an "empty land" (see preface to Wilson and Thompson 1969) have a similar role in justifying colonial-capitalist alienation of land and the concentration of the rural communities into "bantostans" comprising only about 13% of the total land area of South Africa. Much archaeological scholarship in South Africa has resulted in successfully demonstrating the incorrectness of these assertions, for example, Derricourt (1977), Hall (1982), Inskip (1969, 1981), Maggs (1979) and Mason (1962). The more subtle ideological models chosen by some archaeologists working in southern Africa have also been analysed (Hall 1982).

Notwithstanding the volume and quality of research carried out in South African institutions and the longstanding links with counterparts in Western Europe and the U.S.A., it should not be forgotten that this academic production is situated in universities which are racially segregated and which themselves have underlined the erosion of basic academic freedom in the areas of student and staff selection. There are more than 50 archaeologists currently working at South African Institutions; and of these, only two are classified as "non-white" by the South African Government.

In the field of dissemination of archaeological information in schools severe difficulties are encountered in relation to conflicts with the syllabus requirements of "Bantu education". The lack of large scale support for educational programmes which contain the product of archaeological research limits the value of the persistent and farsighted efforts of some archaeologists (e.g. Mason 1971, Voigt 1972). In at least one of the bantustans, on the contrary -- particularly in relation to the reconstruction of the royal capitals of Kwa-Zulu -- archaeology is being generously funded to stimulate a form of pseudo-nationalism, rigidly constrained within the ideological framework of apartheid. It is this sector which poses the most serious long term danger for archaeology, for even if the racial imbalance were to be corrected it is probable that the new archeologists would be trained and employed in segregated institutions which are an integral part of the apartheid state apparatus.

Given the widespread support, including that of independent states from southern Africa and the United Nations, to calls for anti-apartheid groups, and in particular the African National Congress, for a complete boycott of economic, cultural and sporting links with South Africa, any links between American, West European and South African archaeological institutions will inevitably come under scrutiny. The issue is complex and needs to be discussed. There are many people in southern and eastern Africa who believe that it is no longer sufficient

merely to pay lip service to condemning racial discrimination.

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