

ARCHAEOLOGY AND POLITICS

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This issue of ARC departs from previous ones in that the theme cannot be subsumed under a 'paradigm', nor does it, as the subject of detailed analysis, need to be proclaimed as 'New'. To situate the theme thus, in our view, is necessitated by facts like the 'export' and subsequent growth of archaeology in ex-colonies, or by the plethora of instances (such as in the colonial expropriation of antiquities) with which archaeology, past and present, is beleaguered. Besides, after the row over the World Archaeological Congress, to proclaim the theme as something novel is to sensationalise unnecessarily the existence of tracts where the beacons of 'Critical Self-consciousness' have not traversed and through which straggling archaeologists, in cautionary wisdom, hasten homewards.

The papers presented here have been conceived and written against several backdrops, the most immediate being the controversy over South African/Namibian participation at the 1986 World Archaeology Congress. This has, in terms of the ban and ensuing resignations and developments (cf. ARC 4:2; Shaw, Hodder, Champion and Shennan, this volume), provided for discerning archaeologists, an unprecedented context in which to discuss the future of the archaeological community as a whole. If only for the scale of this upheaval and the pedagogy that has accrued on the nature of politics in archaeology, 1985-86 has generated the stuff of which folklore is made. The least of these several illuminations is that the archaeologist (and therefore archaeology) is not divorced from that realm of social relations called politics. Let's face it. Persuasion on this fundamental premise is the least of our concerns here and those still arguing for a separation between the two are referred to Langford's more explicit indictment of archaeological practice (1983).

In the issues of World Archaeology 13(2 and 3) which examined the 'regional traditions' of archaeology the world over, it was the editorial contention that:

...political or class differences do not exhaust the diversity of factors that have influenced the development of archaeology in the various parts of the world...Nor do they explain the subtlety, complexity and innovativeness of the responses that archaeologists in various countries have made...
(Trigger and Glover 1981, 132)

If the mood and substance of this issue contrasts with the above, it is

because we assume, with adequate demonstration, that it is a poor conception of 'politics' (in archaeology) which sees it merely as, or arising from, 'class-difference'. 'Academic Freedom' in archaeology (Shaw and Hodder), ethnicity and 'National' archaeology (Olsen and Fawcett), epistemology and the resultant 'use'/misuse of archaeology (Olsen and Sinclair), are all concepts which define the realm of politics as greater than, but inclusive of, 'class-difference', and thus expand the debate considerably. This should also demonstrate that while attempting to examine archaeological politics it is not necessary to take extreme positions such as 'archaeology and politics are separate' or 'all archaeology is politics' because both positions, in their prolific currency, depend more on zealous emphasis than on an exposition of the political context of archaeological production.

If the implications of 'politics' in archaeology have for most remained negative (and by that means, tabooed or relegated by consensus to supra-academic domains such as the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles) then this is easily understood. Herr Kossina's 'Aryan' theories and those others of the 'lunatic fringe' have become, in common understanding, the symbol of archaeological politics. In all cases, therefore, politics, as a subject, is comfortably relegated to an 'abnormal' domain. Situated outside the stable and saner sanctums of academic archaeology, 'politics', like the leper colonies of the Dark Ages, is separated by the wall of 'good reason' and becomes, by opposition, a significant means for establishing the 'safe' and 'healthy' academics.

'Political Culture' within Archaeology

To what may we ascribe the positions taken by archaeologists on action against apartheid in South Africa, an issue that has now created polarities which cut across and transcend the 'regional'? How is it that the power asymmetry in the 'present' of nation-states with ethnic minorities is reflected in the 'past'? (another phenomenon that latter Olsen's analysis] appears to be present in more parts of the world than the 'Third'.) How is it that despite mobility of researchers, projects and print across boundaries, these traditions do not conflate? Some clarification may be gained from seeing archaeological traditions which while contained in geopolitical boundaries are, for their functioning and reproduction, dependent on the political 'culture' (after Williams 1981) wherein its practitioners are largely embedded. These cultures which may be larger, smaller, or coeval with nation-states, operate much like any other 'culture' -- with accepted thresholds of 'freedom' (academic), modes of dissent, communication and debate, and predilections for valid 'knowledge' and proclivity for change.

The spectrum of lefts and rights (to the centre) that provides classification in the sphere of 'real politics' is not clearly visible here, and although such ideological positioning might be assumed, there is clearly more to the genre of 'political culture' in archaeology. However, a language that changes and 'adapts', features uniquely in various traditions, and the most immediate symbol of changing political culture? Yes, certainly. 'Ideology', 'Power', 'Consciousness', 'Praxis' have loomed up and been used variously. This nexus of concepts, derived from Marxist, Critical Theoretical and other Social Scientific thinking, embodies a change which is both substantive and effecting the constitutive premises for the practice of archaeology. 'Praxis' and 'Ideology' occur in Olsen, Ray, Sinclair and Hodder's contributions and clearly they are used as concepts for analysis. For Olsen, the distinction between and the origin of a 'Norwegian' (normal) and Saami (abnormal) past is inexplicable without reference to Ideology, which is the active medium of attitudes, beliefs and assumptions situated in social asymmetry, giving rise to the politics of the Saami past. Fawcett's concern with the politics of the assimilation of the Ainu past into Japanese history is also only explicable in terms of the Ideology embodied in the national image, and the economic and social concomitants of that for an ethnic minority. For Ray and Sinclair, 'Praxis' assumes a key position since their work is situated in Third World contexts. This has led them particularly to examine the relevance and potential of their own active contributions and hence the increased focus in their work on the gap between what is said, intended, and what in fact is done.

If these form the thesis of political culture, what is, at least linguistically, the anti-thesis? We would locate this in the now proliferate practice of using the same keywords in a manner that is both 'pop' and de-politicised. It is for seminar-buffs to attest that catchy titles like 'Symbols of Power', 'Archaeology of Power', 'Power in the Bronze Age' and others, may in substance make Michel Foucault turn in his grave. 'Power in the Bronze Age', for instance, may be merely about the formal study of distinctive headgear of 'chiefs'! This de-politicised use of keywords, an accepted and popular practice, is as symbolic of cultural appropriation as the Punk safety-pin.

References

- Langford, R.F. 1983. Our heritage -- your playground. Australian Archaeology 16, 1-6
- Trigger, B.G. and Glover, I. 1981. Editorial. World Archaeology 13(2), 133-137.
- Williams, R. 1981. Culture. Glasgow, Fontana.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Thurstan Shaw

The Development of Archaeology

I suppose everyone who reads this journal is familiar with the way archaeology developed, and knows something about the history of the subject over the last 150 years. If they do not, there are easy ways of learning about it (Daniel 1975).

Following the antiquarian interests of a handful of seventeenth and eighteenth century country squires and parsons, there emerged in the nineteenth century a growing flood of interest and activity. These activities included such things as the barrow-hogging which we now deplore, but which filled public museums and private collections with prehistoric artefacts, and also the plundering of the monuments of ancient empires abroad.

There are several things to notice about this enormous development of archaeology in the nineteenth century:

1. It was an activity which was almost entirely carried on by Europeans and predominantly West Europeans at that. It was just one facet of that extraordinarily vigorous nineteenth century European expansionism and self-assurance which has recently been so ably documented as The Triumph of the West (Roberts 1985).
2. The amount of archaeological activity and its characteristic style varied from country to country: this was partly because the archaeological heritage of each country is different, partly on account of accidental differences of style, attitude and character in the individuals who prominently busied themselves with archaeology, and partly because the administrative and legal structures of different countries are different.
3. Already two kinds of archaeology were emerging: the foreign expedition or the 'European abroad' gathering relics of the ancient civilisations' on the one hand, and on the other, the examination of native heritages of antiquities.
4. Archaeology contributed to and benefited from the growth of scientific ways of thinking; similarly it both benefited from and contributed to the rejection of accounts of the history of human life on earth handed down by authoritarian religion. As Darwinian evolutionism made headway, archaeology took on a new importance.