

HENRIETTA L. MOORE, *Space, Text and Gender*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986. 213pp 47 figs., 29 plates and 3 appendices). £25.00 (Hard) ISBN 0-521-30333-8.

Reviewed by Paul Lane

It is rare, these days, to find a work on the nature and meaning of symbolic forms that is unfettered by both obscurantist jargon and abstract theorising. Henrietta Moore's book *Space, Text and Gender* is one such exception, in which clarity of expression and argument compete with the book's subject matter, to make its reading a pleasurable exercise.

If, by itself, this is not a sufficient recommendation to an archaeological readership, then Moore's frames of reference must surely be so. In a general sense, this book is about the connection between beliefs, their representation through material culture and the socio-economic conditions which gave rise to and help maintain cultural productions of this kind. More specifically, it is based on an analysis of the organisation of the residential space of a contemporary society, the Marakwet of Kenya.

The Marakwet homeland lies in the remote Cherangani Hills and Kerio Valley region of western Kenya. As subsistence farmers, the Marakwet rely heavily on the cultivation of sorghum and finger millet, and some secondary crops, as well as livestock herds, in particular goats. The division of labour is such that most farming tasks are allocated to women, while men are responsible for the herds. Nevertheless, both men and women have certain rights in both land and livestock.

The Marakwet tribe are divided into five sections, and it was with one such section, the Endo Marakwet, that Moore worked. Sections are divided, in turn, into a number of patrilineal clan groupings has its own residential area, although more than one patrilineal can reside in a single village. Villages take the form of dispersed agglomerations of discrete compounds, and their boundaries are normally contiguous. Most compounds house a family unit, although through the workings of the domestic cycle, these vary considerably in terms of composition and the age and gender of their members.

As with other societies, certain regularities in the organisation of space within compounds and houses can be discerned. For instance, traditional Endo houses, which in plan are sub-circular, are divided into areas for cooking, sleeping and storage. Moreover the location of each area is always in the same position relative to the other two. In addition, individual houses within a compound are also differentiated from one another, either according to gender or to function. In fact, given the practical association of women with their hearths, the modern division of cooking:sleeping is really only a mutation of the older wife:husband, female:male opposition.

A number of additional factors can further govern the orientation although, as with the arrangement of internal features, houses should ideally stand in the same position vis-a-vis their counterparts. The same concern to maintain consistent relationships of spatial orientation between male- and female-associated components also serves

to structure the location of burials and even the disposal of certain categories of refuse.

Intriguing though these details are, the significant point about Moore's work is that she is intent on demonstrating how individuals, differently situated within age and gender hierarchies, interpret these principles and thereby generate a heterogeneous array of spatial forms. In this respect, her approach to the study of space marks an important departure from the more familiar 'reflectionist' and 'structuralist' perspectives. One difficulty with such modes of analysis, Moore argues, is that they often "emphasise coherence and systemness at the expense of concepts like conflict, contradiction and power" (p. 74). In contrast to these approaches, Moore recommends that the material world and its spatial structure can be viewed as analogous to a written text, and be subject to the same forms of criticism. Moreover, from such a perspective, human agents, as readers of these texts, are seen to be actively engaged in the process of creating and recreating the meanings of these, rather than merely passively responding to them. Consequently, a "theory of the interpretation of spatial texts would attempt to account for the range of different readings for a given spatial frame" (pp. 85-6). It is precisely this which Moore attempts in later chapters, with respect to the different perspectives of young and old, and of men and women.

In Chapter 8, for instance, the preference among younger Marakwet for square rather than round houses, for 'western' rather than indigenous items of household equipment, and a lack of concern

about segregating different types of refuse, are discussed. Although these could be held to be consequences of rather abstract processes such as 'westernisation' and the emergence of a wage-economy, the author is concerned to show how, through changing circumstances, the relational significance of certain elements of the spatial frame has changed.

Thus, for example, while the greater densities of non-indigenous artefacts in the houses of employed men and women might be said to reflect their greater wealth, they also speak of the deliberate strategies of these individuals to direct their capital towards the acquisition of possessions. In turn, these objects assume a significance, and become a yardstick against which the quality of modernity can be judged.

There are further ramifications to this process, in that, partly in order to demonstrate the attributes of modernity, a greater emphasis is placed on entertaining, thereby giving rise to changes to the organisation of household space. In turn, this has led to qualitative changes in the nature of household space, such as a diminishing emphasis on the 'genderisation' of specific domains.

Hence, while in the more traditional compounds houses are differentiated according to gender, the recent trends have had the effect of altering the contextual relationships between such key elements as the hearth, bed and centrepost. As noted in earlier chapters, the associations between these elements and their users have particular symbolic connotations. Hence, by altering the position of the hearth, for example, younger

men and women are not only marking their difference in a physical sense, but are also in the process of creating a new order.

Leaving aside the anthropological merits of this book, I suspect that the observation of greatest significance to the archaeologist is that spatial patterns of material culture are in some respects similar to written texts. Like texts, a particular pattern is open to a variety of interpretations subject to the context and the situation of the individual 'readers'. Recognition of this polysemic quality, however, need not give us too much cause for dismay. Indeed, it could even lead us on to fresh insights into the social words of our prehistoric forebears. For, if we accept Moore's thesis that these polysemic qualities derive from "the conduct of a continual process of argumentation (between human agents)" (p. 81), then our task of interpreting specific patterns is transferred from the immensely difficult search for universal truths to the far simpler one of understanding individual circumstances.

Moreover, by understanding the specific historical contexts of different actions, we will be in a far better position to judge their wider ideological and discursive significance. Anyone doubting this should read this book, in which a number of case studies demonstrate how this is so. Adapting her approach to suit archaeology will not be easy, for it will require altering time-honoured notions about material culture, but it is achievable.

* * *

YOUNG, D.E AND BONNICHSEN, R., Understanding Stone Tools: A Cognitive Approach. Centre for the Study of Early Man, University of Maine at Orono, 1984. 312pp (28 tables, 46 figs. and 3 appendices). No price given. ISBN 0-912933-00-3.

Reviewed by Mark Edmonds

There can be little doubt that the last two decades have witnessed something of an explosion in the number of new perspectives and techniques which have been brought to bear upon the study of lithic materials. As one aspect of this growth, the experimental replication of stone tools, a practice with a long and varied history, has taken on a new significance. Renewed interest in experimental approaches has to a large extent been stimulated by the success with which the technological strategies necessary for the creation of specific artefacts and assemblages have been identified and replicated. However, it is perhaps only more recently that we have begun to see the articulation of this unique body of data within frameworks which attempt to grasp important archaeological nettles.

This volume is one of a growing number of studies that have contributed to the debate concerning possible links between technological behaviour and the nature of society. Such studies have tended to be dogged by a number of problems, not least that of the appropriate scale at which our analyses should be set. As much recent literature suggests, the price that we often pay for elegant but narrowly focussed research is the loss of a wider picture.

Whilst this stimulating study by Young and Bonnichsen is primarily