
GENERAL PERSPECTIVES

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: WHY THEY SHOULD NOT BE
INTEGRATED

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Recently, or perhaps not so recently in the timescale of archaeological fashion, there has been much talk of integrating the discipline of archaeology within the framework of the social sciences. One proponent of this view is Ian Hodder, who states (Hodder 1981, 10):

At several points in this introduction it has been suggested that a mature archaeology means an archaeology involved in, and contributing to a wider debate in the social sciences.

Later in the same article he again states (Hodder 1981, 11):

A mature archaeology must be fully integrated into the social sciences.

What would such integration entail? How could archaeology contribute to the social sciences? It is clear that he is not thinking of the kind of sociology we see in such journals as 'New Society', where observations of contemporary life are directed towards an understanding of contemporary experience. Nor is he thinking of the apparently mundane, but very necessary, research of countless sociologists into the changing patterns of the modern world. He has his eye on higher things, the broader issues of social theory and epistemology. For he says (Hodder 1981, 5):

While the debate is raging in related disciplines, archaeology stands by. Once again full maturity will only be achieved by an involvement in these wider discussions concerning different interpretative procedures and epistemology.

And again in the same article he claims (Hodder 1981, 5):

Yet throughout the discussion presented above the major limits of growth have been when an inward looking mentality has prevented debate of broader issues current within the social sciences.

It should be noted that the concept of 'social science' invoked here is one emptied of any empirical content. It is concerned not with facts, but with broader issues. It is this definition (which is mine,

but which is clearly what the authors cited below are thinking of when they use the term 'social science') of 'social science' as primarily concerned with the construction of theories, as if knowledge were a world of ideas, which is the one which has appeared most attractive to a certain kind of archaeologist. Other archaeologists are, in this light, dreary, dot-obsessed particularists, who can only be redeemed from their fallen state through the intercession of 'social theory'.

The implications then of such remarks are obvious. To be mature, archaeology must become a part of 'social science' in all its aspects. Integration must involve the directing of archaeological observations towards resolving current abstract problems of a broad theoretical nature. It means the translation of archaeological observation into the language of social science. Only in this way can archaeology contribute, and, by implication, only in this way can archaeology be of value as a discipline.

This paper argues that such an approach is completely misguided. Archaeology cannot and should not distort itself in this manner. It is not a social science, it is an historical discipline. It is not in the nature of the enterprise of archaeology to resolve problems of an abstract kind. It is an empirical investigation of the past, whose methods must be directed towards accounting for the observed variability in the material record of humanity. To justify this somewhat sweeping assertion it will be necessary to contrast the methods and aims of social science and of history in its broadest sense.

How do the social sciences proceed? Ever since Comte, and in a sense since Plato, what can collectively be called the social sciences have been motivated by a desire to uncover unchanging principles behind varying social forms. In a sense they have been seeking to refine a general model of the relations between levels of society, between individual action and collective belief, between different positions of status and class, and so forth. In the process they have produced concepts which both historians and archaeologists have found useful.

Yet what is most striking about the social sciences and archaeology is the contrast in their manner of development. Put rather simplistically, archaeology has developed through an interrogation of material facts and the construction of explanations to fit those facts. The ultimate arbiter between competing hypotheses has never been purely and simply a matter of academic fashion, but whether such hypotheses are credible in the light of the evidence. This is not to say that archaeology has never been affected by the general intellectual climate of the times. But ultimately the archaeologist is judged by the plausibility with which he or she marshals data to support his or her case, and argues that his or her case is the most elegant explanation for the observed variability. The currency for the negotiation of truths in archaeology has been until recently the material facts which the archaeologists themselves recover, not what is most acceptable to a panel of experts drawn from the social sciences.

Social science (in the sense discussed above) has gone about its business in a very different way. It has developed through an abstract critique of itself, a gradual refinement of past models of society. For various reasons, previous models are perceived as being in some way unsatisfactory, and the general theory is tinkered with or rebuilt to produce something more acceptable. Such a critique of past models rarely involves the deployment of factual evidence to disprove a thesis or to construct an alternative. Sometimes, it is true, historical circumstance jolts the author into a realization that things are not as they seemed, and in these rare cases a model has been 'tested'. More often, however, logical faults are revealed in past theories. Accounts which once sounded plausible are shown to produce absurdities when pushed to explain certain phenomena. In this respect, social science resembles philosophy in its methodology.

But it seems apparent that the most common reason for the rejection of past hypotheses is a simple dislike of them. For they assume a view of human nature which later sociologists find distasteful. Perhaps it is reductionist. Sometimes it is mystical, or essentialist, or some other kind of -ist. Whatever the case the impression one gains is that it is not to be believed, and that anyone who does believe it is suffering from some kind of moral failure, obvious to those who make the critique, unacknowledged by and therefore so much the worse for the original writer. Lest I be accused of exaggeration, here are some quotes from a respected social theorist, Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1979, 52):

Parson's actors are cultural dopes, but Althusser's agents are structural dopes of even more stunning mediocrity...The true subjects of Althusser's mise en scene, as he candidly admits, are the places and functions that agents occupy.

Giddens' reasons for thinking the accounts of Parsons or Althusser are inadequate, other than their being a view he does not share, are not given. But his dislike is obvious. The cause of this dislike may be variously attributed. It may stem from a political preference, or some a priori belief, or the current climate of thought. It cannot derive from any rational principle of enquiry based on observation.

If it is not a social science, to what class of discipline does archaeology properly belong? It is a part of the historical disciplines, of history in its broadest sense. What then is history? History is the translation of the past into terms that can be understood by the present, a construction of past facts that is only in part 'explanatory' and which must always respect the integrity of the raw material with which it deals. In brief the task of history is not to explain the past, but to account for it. It does not necessarily involve the translation of past facts into a sociological metalanguage, with its eye always upon the receding prospect of the resolution of fundamental social questions, but on the economical conveyance of those features which are necessary for the reader to understand what happened. It is an illustration of the past by the most expedient means available.

But it is also much more than that. To write history is to make the past live. Perhaps the distinction between history and social science has never been better put than by, of all people, W.H. Auden when he said (Auden 1963, 97):

History is strictly speaking the study of questions; the study of answers belongs to anthropology and sociology. To ask a question is to declare war, to make some issue a casus belli; history proper is the study of battles, physical, intellectual or spiritual and the more revolutionary the outcome, the greater the historical interest.

Of course such a procedure necessarily involves relating past facts to current concerns, whether they be the anxieties of the general public or the interests of a wider academic field, but these need not be of a sociological kind. For it is as much a distortion of the aim of history as it is of archaeology to direct the enquiry always towards the improvement of social theory. To seek such a justification for either discipline is to mistake the role each has played and continues to play in our society. The principle underlying the existence of either is the same: to provide not only an awareness but also a critical self-consciousness of the processes that have led to the present. Ours is a society which for some time has required such a sense of the past. It is not my intention to go into the reasons for this, but it is fair to say that it seems to be part of our inheritance from the Ancient World. Critical history began in the 5th century BC, and almost from the first it made use of archaeological data as part of the evidence for examining the conflicting hypotheses concerning the Greeks' own past. Indeed one could argue, somewhat tendentiously, that archaeology has from the first been integrated, not with the social sciences, but with history.

It may be objected that history itself, as it is presently practiced, is a social science in much the same way as anthropology. For it has been argued that historical accounts make use of generalisations and assumptions, uniformities if you will, and that these first have to be established by the social scientist before the historian can make use of them. But this account of historical practice is more of a prescription of how social scientists would prefer historians to go about their business than a description of historical enquiry as it is practiced by historians themselves. For as Arthur Marwick, a modern historian broadly sympathetic to the aims of much social science, has said (Marwick 1970, 106):

Most of the statements which align history most solidly with the social sciences (as presently constituted) are declarations of intent only: and often they are declarations by those least qualified to make them.

It is interesting to note that Marwick himself, although a modern historian, sees no difficulty on the other hand in accommodating archaeo-

logical evidence into historical accounts. Indeed, he clearly thinks (Marwick 1970, 146) that archaeological evidence can be interrogated by the same principles of source criticism that are applied to textual evidence. For him, as for many other historians and archaeologists, history and archaeology have a shared role to play in bringing the past to life.

But this shared role is not the only common feature which distinguishes both archaeology and history from the social sciences. Both proceed, to a much greater extent than the social sciences, by an examination of a multitude of facts and an arbitration between competing hypotheses in relation to those facts. However inclined to resort to ad hominem arguments, however influenced by fashion, ultimately it is by fidelity to and scrutiny of facts that archaeological and historical interpretations should be, and largely are, judged.

This is what archaeology is and should remain. But how has it been changed in the hands of those who would have it 'integrated' within the framework of the social sciences? I have argued that the social sciences and archaeology are incompatible, the former always seeking a refinement of abstract models in terms currently acceptable to an audience of other sociologists, the latter seeking always to translate the past and to account for it economically within the long-established canons of historical argument. The attempt to fit archaeological facts into the mould provided by the social sciences must always therefore produce a distortion. For it necessitates the constant relation of archaeological data to a higher order of abstraction, the facts being mere appearances, having the same epistemological value as Plato assigned to the material world. Within the framework of the social science facts only gain significance in terms of a sociological metalanguage. Some recent examples from archaeologists who generally accept the superior authority of the social sciences should demonstrate this point.

One offshoot of the archaeological interest in 'social science' has been ethnoarchaeology. Originally this subdiscipline sought to relate observations in the ethnographic present to general archaeological questions, such as those regarding depositional processes, taphonomy and the like. But it has been transformed. It now seems to be directing its energies towards resolving problems (or formulating theories) concerning the relationship between material culture and society. This is fine, but it is not archaeology, and one must be sceptical whether these general truths will be of much use to the archaeologist, beyond the recognition that material culture can be used in hitherto unsuspected ways. The reason for scepticism is that much ethnoarchaeological literature seems almost consciously to set out to confirm (not to test) the truth of certain propositions brought in from the wider field of the social sciences.

An example is Mary Braithwaite's article (Braithwaite 1982). She begins by selecting certain statements of Bourdieu, Barth and Giddens, with some modifications of her own, and her interpretation of the use of

material culture of that society is strongly coloured by these propositions. Indeed, observations are immediately re-translated into the language of social science, and it is this which gives these observed actions their significance. What she does not do is to test alternative hypotheses concerning the use of material culture in that society. So embedded are her observations in the terms set out by the social sciences that there is little need for a conclusion. One passage is particularly revealing (Braithwaite 1982, 85):

All the Belande and Azande potters I spoke to gave purely practical reasons for the discrepancy between Belande and Azande beer-making pots and saw the difference in use of decoration only in terms of tradition or taste...As is so in all societies, the explicit reasons given by the Azande for particular practices are often practical or functional, and, as for giving of food, there may be no recognition of the practices or of the inadequacy of the actual explanation offered.

In short, we are presented with the familiar self-depiction of the social scientist, whose access to the higher and more abstract truths of those disciplines enables them to see things which the poor self-deluded natives, be they Azande or perhaps other archaeologists, fail to perceive. What we are not presented with are reasons for thinking that the Azande account of their actions are inadequate. Their account may indeed not fit a theory of material culture which the observer prefers, but why does this make it inadequate? From what facts she has allowed us to glean, it seems to fit the available evidence as well as her account. In her belief that the higher, abstract truths of sociology are self-evidently correct she has neglected to observe the most elementary methodological principle which archaeology has inherited from history, and of much social anthropology. Interpretations cannot be accepted simply because they are currently preferable within a current climate of thought. Rather they must be rigorously justified with reference to the available facts as being the best of several alternatives. Braithwaite seems incapable of treating the Azande account of themselves sufficiently seriously to show how it may be inadequate, and nowhere considers any alternative explanation for the pattern which she sees. In this she is breaking with empirical method, but her account is perfectly consistent with the manner of procedure of that variety of social science with whom we would be 'integrated'.

It is perhaps unfair to choose ethnoarchaeology as an example. The idea that the social sciences provide both a model and a context for archaeological explanation has been accepted by many involved in interpreting prehistory. An example is Chris Tilley. He makes clear his position in an article (Tilley 1982, 36):

Archaeology, conceived as the study of man, and hence man in society, is irretrievably a social science...Failure to tackle problems within sociology

and philosophy can only result in a blind, unsystematic groping towards an understanding of the past. It is sheer dogmatism to suggest otherwise, to suggest that problems within philosophy and social theory can be neatly circumvented in the practical business of carrying out research. In tackling these problems archaeologists can, themselves, contribute towards a wider understanding of social form and social dynamics.

These sentiments can be disputed for several reasons. Firstly, for a discipline to be human and humane it need not be social. The assumption of the priority of the social over other aspects of human life has been the most tenacious dogma in British social science, but that provides no grounds for our accepting it. Moreover, given the diversity of archaeological facts and the range of archaeological interests, and providing it observes the methodological principles of the historical disciplines, archaeology is quite systematic enough. Tilley underestimates the degree to which archaeologists and historians confront philosophical problems simply in the practice of their discipline. Such an involvement need not be explicit.

Yet these are not the main points of disagreement. I do not think that archaeologists can contribute to the social sciences. For one thing, archaeological observations are irredeemably partial and inconclusive, to a much greater extent than is the case in most other humane disciplines. Furthermore (and this has been the main thrust of the argument) the subordination of archaeological investigation to sociological ends diverts the archaeologist from his or her main task, that of interpreting the past economically and convincingly.

Tilley himself provides an example of such distortion. In an article written with Mike Shanks (Shanks and Tilley 1982), he develops a new way of interpreting Neolithic burial practices in England and Scandinavia. The approach itself is novel and the conclusions interesting. Briefly summarised they show that the pattern of disarticulation in the bones in megalithic graves have an ideological significance, being the culturally transformed representation of the body social. Particular attention is drawn towards the observed differences between Scanian and English examples.

This is fine, and it is arguable that concepts derived from the social sciences have been instrumental in providing the necessary stimulus for such an enterprise. Yet there are two features of the article which are irritating. One is the lengthy preamble on matters theoretical, the other the tendency continually to translate the most mundane archaeological observations into sociological terms. The article is too long and the archaeological point they make could have been more succinctly put.

The truth is that the authors' interest in the observable facts is secondary to what they see as its contemporary relevance. It is for

this reason that space is devoted to such definitions as the following (Shanks and Tilley 1982, 131):

Rather than to define ideology, somewhat negatively, in relation to science, and as a necessary omnipresent feature of social formations, we conceive it as a mode(s) of intervention in social relations, carried out through practice, which seeks the reproduction rather than the transformation of the social formation, in the presence of contradictions between structural principles at the level of structure, and clashes of interests at the level of the system.

It was T.S. Eliot who said of Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Medea* that he had (Eliot 1966, 62) "interposed between Euripides and ourselves a barrier more impenetrable than the Greek language". It may equally be said of much 'social science' in archaeology, and most particularly of such definitions as the one above, that it raises an similarly impenetrable barrier between ourselves and the past. The point of Eliot's criticism of Professor Murray was that he had unnecessarily decorated the spare, moving and direct Greek of Euripides with Swinburnian flourishes, because that was what the audience appeared to expect. Euripides had to be made to appear 'highbrow'. In a similar way the social scientists are pandering to the anxieties of our age: the desire not to appear to be falling behind in the broad advance of social theory. It is solely for this reason that archaeology has to appear 'highbrow'.

But this then is surely what integration within the social sciences would mean for archaeology. A lengthy discussion of current issues and a redefinition of terms in the light of those issues would become the *sine qua non* of any archaeological interpretation. Archaeological data could only be given a significance through the intercession of higher sociological truth, archaeological inference would only be of value if it contributed to contemporary sociological debate. Or, as in the example of the article quoted above, archaeological interpretation would be directed towards a critique of such shibboleths as capitalism. This is a distortion of the purpose of archaeology. The significance of archaeological facts lies not in their relevance to current debates but in their historical importance to the societies of the past, and thus to our appreciation of those societies. It is this fundamental integrity of the evidence which, despite protestations to the contrary, the social scientists among us are violating.

Before concluding it is necessary to clear up one possible area of misunderstanding. This is not a polemic against theory, whether sociological or otherwise. It is to be hoped that archaeology will continue to borrow concepts selectively from other disciplines to explain the past. But these borrowings must be made on the archaeologists' own terms. The purpose of theory in archaeology is to enable its practitioners to generate hypotheses, models if you like, to account for

particular facts. Whether or not this ultimately contributes to a refinement of this theory is not something that should unduly concern us.

To sum up, archaeology would not become a more mature discipline if it were to be subordinated to the aims and interests of the social sciences. On the contrary, I believe that it would be better if archaeology modelled itself upon a discipline of genuine maturity, namely history. History is a discipline which has long been possessed of a self-assurance and an authority that derives from a solid basis of methodological agreement, whatever the superficial fractiousness of its politics or the shifting interests of its practitioners. It is a critical discipline which respects its subject matter and seeks to provide interpretations which are more than of contemporary relevance. In archaeology as in history, explanations should stand up to general methodological criteria. Does the explanation encompass all the relevant data? Does it 'fit the facts'? Does it manage to incorporate features which were seen to be inconsistent with alternative hypotheses? What are the logical consequences of such explanation, and do they too fit and make sense of the evidence of which we are aware? It is to these questions that we should primarily address ourselves.

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COMMENTARY

An Appeal for Women in Archaeology

approximately 80 papers, 15 of which were given by women).

There is a need for more female archaeologists as well as a need to study prehistoric women and their role in history. In the following article I will address both of these aspects of women in archaeology and comment on their interdependency.

At first sight the ratio women:men in archaeology may not seem bad at all. In fact, of 80 first year undergraduates in archaeology and anthropology at Cambridge University 48 are women. However, at the graduate level this changes dramatically. Cambridge has at present (Nov. 1986) 57 Ph.D. students, of whom no less than 40 are men. This means that less than one third are women. And these figures are even worse if we consider British students only. Of 37 British Ph.D. students only seven are women. Of the 20 foreign students, on the other hand, 10 (i.e. exactly one half) are women.

This disproportion in numbers increases when one examines, for instance, the research seminars. During 5 terms of seminars at Cambridge (from October 1985 to April 1987) -- in all roughly 50 seminars -- only two were given by women, (if I had counted the three terms of 1986 only, there would have been none!). Now Cambridge may, for various reasons, be an extreme example. However, looking back at the annual meetings of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) I think nobody would disagree that the disproportion is a conspicuous reality in archaeology. (At TAG 1985 in Glasgow there were

Before leaving this topic, I want to comment on the difference between British and foreign students, as mentioned above. The equal number of female and male foreign students may lead one to think that the underrepresentation of women is predominantly a national phenomenon, rather than an international one. A comparison with the Danish universities proves otherwise. At the Department of Prehistory, University of Aarhus, the archaeology course is a tripartite system consisting of two year modules, corresponding very roughly to BA, MA and Ph.D. (*Bifag Hovedfag and Magister Konferens*). The Ph.D. level is strongly dominated by women (probably a ratio of four to one).

However, a Ph.D. in archaeology may easily lead to unemployment. Most men (and luckily an increasing number of women) leave university after the MA to take up excavation or museum jobs. The female Ph.D. students are too often out of touch with practical archaeology, which is one reason why they opt for the Ph.D., which is usually conceived of as more theoretical. Unfortunately, non-practical jobs in archaeology (teaching or pure research positions) are almost non-existent at the moment, so even though several women have a higher education than many of the men, they end up on the periphery.

In the University of Copenhagen, where only the BA and the Ph.D. are