

the Council for Independent Archaeology -- into existence, adopted the draft constitution and elected a governing committee.

It is difficult to see quite why there should have been -- and remains -- so much opposition to the new organisation. The name of the new body deliberately reflects that of the CBA (and it shares its initials with an even more famous -- or notorious -- organisation) but any quick replacement of the CBA by the CIA must be ruled out. Personalities certainly played a large part -- some of those involved in the CIA are not popular among certain sections of the archaeological community. But so what? Surely the point is that to work with someone towards a common end does not require that you like or even agree with them. Archaeology is an academic discipline: debate is a key part in it. It was clear from the second Congress that some form of new body was to be established, and very shortly obvious that it could not be a formal part of the CBA. The CBA was throughout involved in the preliminary discussions, and yet there is now evidence of some dismay in the counsels of the CBA that the CIA has come into existence. This is at least illogical and perhaps even indicative of serious organisational flaws in British archaeology: because of the confusion at the final session of the third Congress the new body was voted into being by less than forty people. Are we seriously expected to believe that the CBA considers itself threatened by such a small body? Are the structures of British archaeology so fragile? The main argument against the formation of the new body was that it would serve only to divide archaeology and divert resources from other needs. Some of those involved believed that the new Council should tap new resources and could thus act as a valuable support to the Independent sector in archaeology, to the CBA and to archaeology as a whole. By failing to listen to what was said and intended and by walking out at a crucial moment -- and taking others with them -- the opponents of the new group denied these people their natural constituency among the members of the new Council. The end result may well be what the opponents feared (or said they did) -- and it must be deemed their fault.

Further Congresses of Independent Archaeologists are planned. They will be organised by the new Council for Independent Archaeology. The Congress was, to my knowledge, the only regular open meeting of archaeologists in this country where matters of internal political and organisational concern to archaeology were discussed. The membership of the body to organise them in future consists largely of the people who gave the "... and then I dug ...", "my last dig" and "my private site" presentations at former Congresses. If they have their way a useful biennial meeting -- flawed but getting better -- will disappear from the archaeological round to be replaced by a mere showpiece for their egos.

IN SEARCH OF THE SACRED...? SOME THEMES RAISED BY *SACRED AND PROFANE: A CONFERENCE ON ARCHAEOLOGY, RITUAL AND RELIGION*, OXFORD, 28th-29th OCTOBER, 1989

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The influence of Emile Durkheim lies like an ancestral shade over the human sciences, and in particular the study of religion. As a member of the sociological Holy Trinity, with Marx and Weber as fellow soul-mates, he was involved in the formation (one might even say Genesis) of some of the main analytical categories used by students of past and present societies.

The title of this conference, *The Sacred and the Profane* might appear to reflect a Durkheimian concern with the separation of 'holy' from 'mundane' spheres of social action. However, as the sessions proceeded, it became clear that many speakers came not so much to praise the spirit of Durkheim, but to bury, or at least modify, it.

The content of papers was diverse, ranging from analyses of Iranian tombstones (Inge Demant Mortensen) to reflections on Japanese totems (Simon Kaner). Even so, many provided variations on a single, important theme: Is it possible, or indeed desirable, to separate off religious or ritual practices from other forms of behaviour? Or does this fall into the trap, constructed by an unlikely (and unholy?) alliance of theologians and 'materialists', of developing a notion of the sacred as merely comprising the irrational -- that which cannot be explained in terms of 'commonsense'?

In the first paper, John Barrett surveyed some problems of definition. Many have assumed that ritual is a specific form of human action, but, he asked, on what grounds can we do this? Even anthropologists have found it difficult to come up with any satisfactory definition of ritual activity. We might argue that it concerns symbolic action, but since all human behaviour works in this way, such an argument is not precise enough for analytical purposes. Thus far, Barrett's argument echoed some of the debates which have raged within anthropological circles. These have concerned the extent to which ritual can be seen as the non-technical or aesthetic aspect of all behaviour, as well as the question of whether ritual need necessarily be related to the sphere of the sacred.

For the archaeologist, the idea that the sacred can always be recognized as involving a discrete sphere of action is dangerously seductive: either it becomes that which is clearly separate from the domestic world -- like large monuments or temples -- or it serves as an explanatory dustbin, a category into which data that are anomalous (and therefore dangerous to

established paradigms) are gratefully cast. Just as the Catholic Church has neutralized potentially dangerous innovators by classifying them as saints or martyrs, so the archaeologist can call puzzling data 'religious', or 'ritualistic', and thus divorced it from material that is readily explicable by other names. This point was well made by a number of speakers at the conference. Annie Grant, discussing the interpretation of animal bone remains, noted that religious beliefs have only been invoked as a means of explanation when 'unusual' deposits have been found, such as complete skeletons. Both she and J.D. Hill stressed the idea that the rigid separation of the economic from the religious is potentially misleading. In interpreting buried animal remains, sacrifice need not necessarily be distinguished from the more prosaic need to provide sustenance. The boundaries between sacred and profane behaviour may be flexible or blurred.

Eleanor Scott also argued against purely economic interpretations when discussing burials in Romano-British villas. How do we distinguish between 'ritual' and 'rubbish' deposits in such contexts? Some Romanists have been biased towards materialist explanations, in which the presence of religion and ritual are denied unless placed within the safe boundaries of a temple precinct. The inhabitants of villas have been seen as rational beings (i.e. just like us): after all, they had central heating and seemed to like taking baths.... In contrast, she argued that in Roman Britain, attitudes to death were probably very different from our own. From the evidence it is possible to posit the practice of infanticide associated with votive contexts, and often with the burial of animals. Could this suggest the presence of ritual action associated with a Celtic revitalization movement, reacting against the domination of an occupying power?

Of course, once we have identified what we think is evidence of religious activity, however this is defined, we are confronted with an even thornier archaeological problem: that of meaning. For instance, can such behaviour be seen as involving a Durkheimian reflection of social organization, a Weberian system of ethics related in complex ways to economic activity and authority, or a Marxist vehicle of a dominant (and 'mystifying') ideology?

Not surprisingly, no definitive answers were provided at the conference. Rather, a number of different interpretative strategies became evident. Chris Chippindale argued against 'commonsense' and necessarily ethnocentric interpretations of the Copper/Bronze Age rock engravings of Monte Bego in the French Alps. For him, meaning can only be produced through a painstaking examination of archaeological context: either by looking at empirical archaeological evidence of the period and region, or by focussing on the mass of repeated (as opposed to rare) figures. The result is not a phenomenological appreciation of the intentions and motivations of the individual creators of figures, since this is clearly irrecoverable. Rather, it links the production of such figures to their creators' aspirations of status and prestige.

Julian Richards adopted a broadly structuralist approach. Given that the material world of the pagan Anglo-Saxons can be seen to be partially structured by religious beliefs, he argued that it may be possible to develop an underlying grammar in order to interpret the iconography of mortuary behaviour. All aspects of the decoration of urns can be seen to have symbolic meaning: while particular forms have no meaning in themselves, understanding can come from the appreciation of general patterns. If similar patterns exist between, for instance, brooches and pots, the transformation of a message can be seen to have occurred across different media of expression. Furthermore, evidence of settlement and cemeteries can be examined to show how both are products of a single ideological system. The focus here seems to rest on the detection and contextualization of underlying symbolic patterns.

Others took a more dynamic view of archaeological material, emphasizing notions of conflict and change, as well as the possibility of stability through social reproduction. Charlotte Damm and Paul Garwood, for instance, both attempted to use structuration theory to emphasize the role of ritual and religion in both producing and reproducing the structure of society. Thus, according to Damm, the reshaping of society that is required after death provides the opportunity for ritual change and the potential expression of new opinions. Consequently, burials in Neolithic Denmark can be seen as foci for social conflict between old orders and new forms of social organization.

John Barrett pointed to the potential for multiple interpretations contained within ritual: a consequence of this is that dominant ideologies are not reproduced in any simple way. 'Claims' made in a ritual have to be appreciated and answered for them to be effective, but of course ritual discourse is often highly ambiguous and, in some cases, secretive. Paul Garwood, following Maurice Bloch, stressed that the form of ritual practice may remain the same over time, and yet its meanings may change. A number of speakers argued against the idea of synthesizing a single world view or ideological system from the archaeological record.

Approaches which recognise the existence of multiple and contested visions of the world as expressed through actions and symbols cannot be ignored. The suggestion that social actors are bound by unproblematic constraints of consensual ties and mechanical solidarity is no longer tenable. From an anthropological point of view, however, the crucial question is simply put: to what extent are such differences in world-view identifiable from the archaeological record? Of course, this very much depends on the material available and as John Barrett pointed out "archaeology is difficult ...". Nevertheless, all such approaches draw heavily upon work deriving from other disciplines (anthropology, literary theory, sociology). These other disciplines undoubtedly have their own problems, but even so the presence of conflicting social practices, multiple readings (of behaviour as well as literary texts) and forms of revolt -- overt and covert -- can be seen much more easily here than in archaeology, where the basic data, if not entirely mute, is hardly talkative.

Many speakers, of varying theoretical persuasions, shared one broadly similar means of interpreting their evidence. This was the assumption that political and power relations formed the 'bottom line' of any analysis. Through the expression of religious ideology, the construction of material culture, or the performance of ritual, actors could be seen as seeking status, claiming to define the world on their own terms (successfully or otherwise) and attempting to control the reproduction of social practices. Such an approach seems to me to be valid, although I wonder to what extent we can extend our own notions of power, status, or hierarchy back into a past whose values we cannot really understand. Simon Kaner's exclamation: 'I don't know -- I wasn't there!' does seem a rather restricted hermeneutic approach. However, we should avoid producing a new form of reductionism, where an undifferentiated notion of 'power' replaces that of 'function' as a concept which is taken for granted rather than being a focus for analysis in itself.

In stressing the idea of power and status, we are of course reading major concerns of our own lives into the archaeological record. So perhaps Durkheim had a point after all. His rigid separation of the sacred from the profane may be misleading for archaeological purposes, but the distinction is not entirely vacuous. The attempt to link beliefs with forms of social organization has some validity, albeit a limited one. As Doug Bailey argued, academic disciplines are rather close to religious systems, and are likely to express, even in distorted form, the concerns of the sub-cultures which produce them. Do we not have our own consecrated spaces (museums as opposed to churches), sacred texts (*Analytical Archaeology ...?*) and closed systems of belief? In our profane lives we are concerned with the politics behind who is hired and fired, or contradicted and confirmed in debate. Is it any wonder, therefore, that our 'sacred knowledge' includes models of power relations that are all too familiar?

When not at the conference, much of my time was spent at Blackfriars, the Catholic Priory nearby. The quiet and peace of the Priory, which can provide spiritual sustenance even for an atheist academic, was punctuated by the satisfaction of rather more worldly concerns, through the consumption of large amounts of excellent food and wine. This particular mixture of the sacred and profane proved most enjoyable, but difficult to combine with the maintenance of concentration in the conference's dark, warm and exceedingly comfortable lecture-theatre.

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My thanks to Anthony Sinclair for comments on this piece.

#### NEWS FROM THE ACTIVES MUSEUM: BOMB ATTACK ON EXCAVATED FORMER GESTAPO AND SS HEADQUARTERS

Frederick Baker

The exhibition of the Actives Museum's excavation of the former SS and Gestapo headquarters in Berlin has been bombed. At 9 p.m. on March 3rd 1989 a five litre petrol device shattered the windows of the exhibition building and started a fire. The prompt action of the watchman stopped the fire reaching the display panels (*Der Tagesspiegel* 1989). No organisation or individual claimed responsibility for the attack, although police suspect the bomb to be the work of neo-Fascists (*die tageszeitung* 1989b).

The response to what Frank Dingel of the Actives Museum described as "a provocation for a trial of strength" (pers. comm.) has been to take a copy of the exhibition "The topography of the terror" to East Berlin, where it was well received (Dingel 1989), and then to the former concentration camps of Buchenwald, Brandenburg and Sachsenhausen. The visit to East Berlin is particularly important, since only five years ago Erich Honecker imprisoned two architects for taking part in an international competition to build a memorial to the victims of the Gestapo and the SS - who ironically include Honecker himself, imprisoned by the Gestapo as a communist (Baker 1987). International support has also increased with the World Archaeological Congress joining ARC as an institutional supporter, and Austria's Chancellor Franz Vranitsky visiting the site. On a more local level the Actives Museum has responded to the increased activity of the far right by combining with other anti-Fascist groups in Berlin in the setting up of a telephone line to report racial harassment and racist graffiti (*die tageszeitung* 1989a).

The long term future of the site is now being decided by a commission appointed by the Senate of West Berlin, who duly published their interim report on October 23rd. Encouragingly the commission supports many of the Active Museum's proposals for the site, suggesting that it should be left largely unchanged with the construction of educational and research facilities adjacent to the present exhibition space (Aktives Museum 1989).

#### References

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