

2 Public presentations and private concerns: archaeology in the pages of *National Geographic*

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This study attempts to understand how archaeology participates in the formation of the dominant political ideology of America. We start with the premise that the way in which any group of people charts its past, and what is valued from that past, are social practices, embedded in a larger logic and broader set of actions (Gero in press). The prehistoric past, like other aspects of knowledge, is mediated and constrained by a contemporary social context which provides an ideology for interpretation. At the same time, interpretations of the past play an active function, a *political* function, in legitimating the present context, naturalizing the past so that it appears to lead logically to present social practices and values (Conkey & Spector 1984, Leone 1984). In this chapter, we inspect how archaeology is presented in the pages of *National Geographic Magazine* and how, in this particular context, archaeology is touted, exploited, and capitalized upon to reinforce the dominant ideology that produced it. Thus, we hope to demonstrate the closeness of fit between archaeology as a particular means of organizing and presenting the past and the North American industrialized, capitalist state whose past it so effectively tells.

National Geographic Magazine, which in 1988 celebrated its hundredth year of publication, has enjoyed a particularly long history and wide circulation record in comparison with other popular American magazines. In fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the sum total of what many Americans know about archaeology comes directly from its pages, or at least that it has often served as an introduction to and stimulus for learning more about the subject. Evidently the version of archaeology it presents is extremely effective in fixing images and transmitting messages about the past into American homes. Moreover, the origins, intellectual ancestry, and social lineage of the *National Geographic Magazine* are all peculiarly American, advancing the democratic principles on which the USA was founded and embodying the contradictions inherent in a capitalist class society. How then do images and accounts of archaeology in the magazine perpetuate the ideological interests and perspectives of American expansionism and capitalism?

The history of *National Geographic Magazine*

Before we delve into the familiar yellow-covered, glossy-paged magazine, some history is essential. The founding of the National Geographic Society in 1888 coincided with a transformed world view. There was a growing American faith in the production and distribution of goods as a primary means of improving the human condition. At the turn of the century, when *National Geographic Magazine* was modernized and assumed its present publication form, America's quest for new frontiers, new markets, and a knowledge of the world expanded in the larger context of a developing capitalist world order. Education, science, and research were promoted as the paths to American progress and to the growth of American power and influence (see Arnove 1980, Cawleti 1968, Harris 1978, Oleson & Voss 1979). The recognition that American progress depended on trained experts, together with an abundance of surplus capital, led to the formation of universities as we know them today and to national organizations of specialists and philanthropic foundations that sponsored scientific research. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, once-isolated regional learned societies had become centred in an expanding network of national organizations dedicated to the advancement of specialized knowledge. These new organizations were seen as 'fundamental instruments of material and cultural progress' (Oleson & Voss 1979, p. ix). The formation of the National Geographic Society, dedicated to the advancement and dissemination of specialized geographic knowledge, was part of this movement.

National Geographic and the democratic ideal

The National Geographic Society's origins were exclusive and intellectual, growing out of a meeting between a group of genteel avocational scholars and a few celebrated geographers and explorers in January 1888, in the prestigious Cosmos Club in Washington, DC. Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a well-known lawyer and financial underwriter of the newly invented telephone, became the Society's first president; on his death in 1897, Alexander Graham Bell, a distinguished inventor, a founding father of the Society, and Hubbard's son-in-law, assumed the presidency of the Society, along with its then floundering publication. Bell's first step was to hand-pick and personally subsidize a new publications editor, choosing a recent Amherst College graduate and son of a close friend, Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, who proceeded in 1900 to marry Bell's daughter Elsie May. In 1903, the Hubbard and Bell families presented the society with a permanent facility, Hubbard Memorial Hall, laying the foundations for a tight family venture that rapidly became a popular national institution.

In 1899, in a climate of increasing professionalism and specialization of knowledge, the educational distance between elite scholars and general readers was thought to be unbridgeable; the idea of making geography or any other scholarly pursuit accessible to a general audience was revolution-

ary in this context. One of Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor's first battles was to convince the Board of Managers that the best way to fulfil the mission of the Society's founding fathers – and the key to the magazine's solvency – was to take geography into the homes of the American people. He reasoned:

Why not transform the Society's magazine from one of cold geographic fact, expressed in hieroglyphic terms which the layman could not understand, into a vehicle for carrying the living, breathing, human interest truth about this great world of ours? Would not that be the greatest agency of all for the diffusion of geographic knowledge? It was my job to change that bright vision into fact. But how to do it? Where to start? . . . Finally I was convinced I had the answer: each [article] was [to be] an accurate, eyewitness, firsthand account. Each contained simple, straightforward writing – writing that sought to make pictures in the reader's mind. (Grosvenor 1957, pp. 23–4)

Along with non-technical language, pictorial illustrations became the hallmark of the *National Geographic* making faraway places and people real and immediate while also humanizing them. The success of the first series of exotic photographs (1903), featuring Filipino women naked from the waist up, quickly confirmed Grosvenor's conviction of the power of pictures to make geography come alive and initiated a long-standing interest on the part of American male readers in the geography of foreign women.

As Grosvenor gained greater control over the magazine, becoming in 1907 its chief executive and a trustee of the Society, he increasingly asserted his populist vision of a magazine for large masses of people: 'We [felt we] should give our members what they wanted, not what some specialist thought they should have' (Grosvenor 1957, p. 34). A wide variety of natural phenomena, including plants and animals, prehistory and exotic peoples, became subjects of *National Geographic* articles and extended the life of the old rubric of 'natural history' into a time when scholars were parcelling it up among their various specialities (Pauly 1979, p. 527).

In the spirit of popularization and entrepreneurship, Grosvenor's second battle involved opening up membership of the National Geographic Society to anyone and everyone regardless of education, occupation, or social status, and using membership subscriptions to sponsor expeditions and underwrite publication costs. No distinctions were to be made between scholars and laymen, nor were there to be special fellows who alone would discuss and decide technical matters: 'Class distinctions of this kind, which are very well in a monarchical country where aristocratic distinctions are recognized . . . [are] somewhat out of place in a republic like the United States, (Bell 1912, pp. 274–5).

At the same time, while assuring the membership that a professional elite did not dominate the Society, Grosvenor made membership appear special and exclusive. Membership was only to be by sponsorship, and if someone did not personally know a member, the Society would provide a list of

people living close by who might become sponsors (Grosvenor 1957). In advising Grosvenor on this procedure, Alexander Graham Bell noted in 1904:

I think therefore the applicant should not be asked to enclose a check in payment of his dues as this suggests OF COURSE he will be elected a member if he sends his money. Such an impression should be avoided as tending to lower the dignity of the Society. (cited in Pauly 1979, p. 529)

Yet the membership has no voice in policy-making nor in the selection of research projects, which are partly funded through annual membership dues.

As recounted by Grosvenor (1936, 1957), it took several difficult years for his ideas of popularizing geography and subscription by membership to win the full support of the Board. By 1910, however, *National Geographic's* mission of increasing membership subscriptions had become a frequent theme of editorial statements in the magazine that proudly asserted the financial independence of the democratic institution:

The society has no endowment, nothing coming to it but the membership fees. No millionaire has since come forward to help us out, yet the society today has a great endowment raised by its own efforts . . . We have never had to take off our hats to any multi-millionaire for having endowed the society with a million dollars; we have done it ourselves. (Bell 1912, p. 273)

The reiterated myth of a membership of common people building their own society and responsible for their own fates has undoubtedly contributed to the outstanding success of the National Geographic Society; we trace its growth from 900 members in 1899 to more than 750 000 in 1920, to over a million in 1930, to two million by 1950, with membership topping 10 500 000 in 1981.

From the time of its populist reorganization, then, the National Geographic Society embodied a set of contradictions. On the one hand, we note its obviously elitist and intellectual foundations within a network of inter-related, intermarrying American blue-blood families who are closely aligned with the political and financial interests of the American capitalist establishment. On the other hand, we see in *National Geographic Magazine* the consistent promulgation of an ideology replicating the most sacred ideals of American democracy: participation by the common man on an equal footing in all endeavours, and the image of the rugged individual making it on his own. This was clearly stated in 1938: *National Geographic Magazine* 'helps to open up the highways and by-ways of the world . . . [and] the janitor, plumber and loneliest lighthouse keeper share with kings and scientists the fun of sending an expedition to Peru or an explorer to the South Pole' (Ross

1938, p. 24). Here, congruent with widely shared American values, the ideology of democracy has been used to mask the reality of elite control within the Society. This marked parallelism suggests that the magazine's popularity may depend in part on its ability to replicate American ideology so ingenuously, selling back to its readers what they already believe.

National Geographic and American expansionism

The growth of *National Geographic Magazine* also parallels the growth of American global influence. The turn of the century marks the beginning of economic and political expansionism beyond American continental borders, a strategy promoted in humanistic terms by the magazine. The National Geographic Society recognized that it 'could assist the nation in dealing effectively with its new global responsibilities through research in political and economic geography' (Pauly 1979, p. 521), and undertook to advertise the benefits of colonialism in a format that could be broadly embraced and widely understood. After building up military strength in the late 19th century, the United States moved to forge a confederation of North and South America in the so-called Pan American Union. The Spanish-American War of 1898 yielded new US possessions: the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico; Latin American countries and customs suddenly became of great interest and concern to Americans (Abramson 1987, p. 57).

National Geographic Magazine monitored territorial acquisitions and reported on geographical areas where changes of power seemed imminent. But it was the coverage of the First World War that really consolidated its readership around a national policy concern: each issue of the early war years summarized the preceding month's military highlights and plotted the combatants' positions; every article in 1917 and 1918 related directly to the war effort. Moreover, the National Geographic Society's maps were placed at the service of the military and when the draft law was passed, the Society offered the use of its stencil machines to help mail out the ten million notices, and its employees volunteered to run the machines. Copies of *National Geographic Magazine* were sent free to all army bases, camps, YMCAs, and to American soldiers fighting in Europe (Abramson 1987, p. 118).

When the war began in 1914, the National Geographic Society had 285 000 members; by the armistice in November 1918, membership had reached 650 000 (Abramson 1987, p. 119). Thereafter, the acquisition of territory, cheap labour, and political influence was inextricably linked to the acquisition of knowledge for American readers, all packaged together in winning smiles and hearty handshakes as *National Geographic* editors travelled the world, acting as self-proclaimed US goodwill ambassadors.

In aligning the interests of the Society with those of the nation, the editors associated themselves (and continue to do so) with the political and military leaders of the nation. Like large corporations and philanthropic foundations with their interlocking directorates, the Society has always invited policy-

makers, captains of industry, statesmen, heads of government bureaus, and high-ranking military officials to serve as directors, extending its influence considerably beyond the realm of geographic research into the sphere of national and international policy.¹ For many years, most contributors to *National Geographic Magazine* enjoyed official positions with various departments of the government and included United States presidents and vice-presidents, congressmen, justices of the Supreme Court, and members of the cabinet (Mott 1957, p. 625). It is the President of the United States who bestows the Society's Hubbard Medal for exceptional achievements in geography, although the head of state is obviously not involved in less politically relevant lines of scholarship.

Not only is the Society linked to national policy through its board of directors, but it has served the government in various ways. Its maps and photographs have provided 'a veritable goldmine' of information to the government and to intelligence sections of the armed services (1943, Vol. 83: 277²), and articles such as 'Maps for victory: National Geographic Society's charts used in war on land, sea and in the air' (1942, Vol. 81: 667) are typical wartime entries. Many articles assume a strong editorial tone, directly asserting US foreign policy in the framework of geographic concerns, as suggested by such titles as: 'Wards of the United States: notes on what our country is doing for Santo Domingo, Nicaragua, and Haiti' (1916, Vol. 30: 143); 'Germany's dream of world domination' (1918, Vol. 33: 559); 'The Hawaiian Islands: American's strongest outpost for defense - the volcanic and floral wonderland of the world' (1924, Vol. 45: 115); 'New map reveals the progress and wonders of our country' (1933, Vol. 63: 650); 'Your Society aids war effort' (1943, Vol. 83: 277); 'Pacific wards of Uncle Sam' (1948, Vol. 94: 80); and, 'Iraq - where oil and water mix' (1958, Vol. 114: 443).

National Geographic expressly perceives its role as an extension of American diplomacy. During the First World War, Grosvenor wrote, 'The months that lie ahead are pregnant with opportunities for national service and for achievements in the increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge . . . With the sustaining support of each individual member, the Society cannot fail to prove equal to and worthy of these opportunities' (1918, p. 375). In a letter to a friend in 1918 (1957, p. 5), he explicitly stated, 'I intend to use *National Geographic Magazine* to the best of my ability to promote a better understanding between Great Britain and the United States.'

National Geographic, then, is all-American, as American as Mom, apple-pie, and industrial capitalism. Its themes are expansion and discovery, homage to boundless American ability, ambition, and resourcefulness, showing that Americans can go anywhere and do anything, and that strategic resources for some is knowledge for all. Here is geography at the service of society, promoting America, democracy, and internationalism through exploration, expansion, and imperialism:

The clerk in the store or the mechanic in a mill may not consciously engage in any enterprise [of discovery], but when he learns that the government of which he is a part has . . . opened a town on the shores of the North Pacific . . . and has driven a railroad nearly 40 miles inland toward the Arctic Circle on its way to the coal fields of the Matanuska and the gold fields of the Tanana, he has a feeling that he, too, is participating in the making of this new world. (Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane in *National Geographic Magazine*, 1915, Vol. 28: 590)

National Geographic readers are swept along in the expansionist, imperialist enterprise, given gorgeous pictures and thrilling undertakings in the name of American goodwill, accepting the ideology of a collective good derived from a course of national imperialism. Yet official editorial policy maintained (and maintains) a contradictory neutrality. Clearly formulated the same year as Lane's expansionist pronouncement, it was encapsulated in 'Seven [editorial] principles' (Vol. 28: 318-20):

- 1 The first principle is absolute accuracy;
- 2 An abundance of beautiful, instructive and artistic illustrations;
- 3 Everything printed in the Magazine must have permanent value;
- 4 All personalities and notes of a trivial character are avoided;
- 5 Nothing of a partisan or controversial character is printed;
- 6 Only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided;
- 7 The contents of each number is planned with a view of being timely.

These same principles were reaffirmed almost verbatim in the magazine in 1936 and again in 1957, during the second half of Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor's 54 years as editor and director, and then again by his son Melville Bell Grosvenor in 1967, ten years after assuming the editorship, and yet again by his grandson, Gilbert M. Grosvenor, the Society's current president, in 1974 and in 1978. The bloodline continuity of leadership underscores the remarkable consistency of editorial policy and publication programme maintained by the magazine throughout its existence. As the principles are repeated, they reiterate a journalistic honour code, insisting on the impartiality of the magazine. It is the disavowed propaganda which we now examine in seeing how archaeology is treated in its pages.

Analysis of archaeology in *National Geographic Magazine*

The archaeological content of *National Geographic Magazine* reveals various ways that archaeology is used to build and promote a nationalist ideology. The information presented here is based on a survey of the distribution of all

the magazine's archaeological articles from 1900 to 1985, and on a more intensive systematic sample of archaeology articles that appeared every third year of publication, supplemented by additional volumes when historically needed. In total, more than 50 per cent of the volumes published between 1900 and 1985 were researched. We discuss our findings under three broad categories that delineate ways in which we believe the magazine used archaeological research to further its goals.

The thrill of archaeology

J. O. LaGorce, G. H. Grosvenor's first paid employee and a long-time *National Geographic* editor, recognized the power of glamourized knowledge: 'Behind the term geography is exploration. Behind that is adventure and just over the hill is romance' (Hellman 1943, p. 29). Behind archaeology in the magazine is an intensification of drama that portrays archaeology as a process of exploration and discovery, emphasizing resource extraction and a search for treasure. Archaeology validates the exploration of exotic landscapes in the name of scientific enterprise, using tales of archaeological discovery to heighten knowledge into super-drama, entertaining a popular fascination with the remote and the spectacular while progressive inroads are made to extract the resources of foreign lands. Archaeological sites are overtly cast as reservoirs of enormous riches, as seen in article titles spanning decades of publication:

- 1912 'Forgotten ruins of Indo-China: the most profusely and richly carved group of buildings in the world' (Vol. 10: 392)
- 1930 'A new alphabet of the ancients is unearthed: an inconspicuous mound in northern Syria yields archaeological treasures of far reaching significance' (Vol. 58: 477)
- 1942 'Finding jewels of jade in a Mexican swamp' (Vol. 82: 635)
- 1955 'Fresh treasures from Egypt's ancient sands' (Vol. 108: 611)
- 1965 'Drowned galleons yield Spanish gold' (Vol. 127: 1)
- 1978 'Regal treasures from a Macedonian tomb' (Vol. 154: 55)

The hint of treasure is always gleaming behind the edge of the archaeologists' shovel or trowel, as *National Geographic* systematically blurs the distinction between 'treasures of scientific value' and items that would bring huge prices on the international art and antiquities market.

There is one significant caveat to acquiring archaeological treasure: in contrast with other geoscientific endeavours, archaeology offers rewards of data, artefactual and associational, only to the investigator who arrives *first* at the site. Subsequent scholars who come to study find little but architectural foundations, backdirt piles, and debitage. The difference between actually opening the tomb/raising the galleon/finding the jewels of jade *versus* getting to the site even shortly after the excavations are closed underscores archaeology as the particular kind of all-or-nothing enterprise that demands

Americans be quick and aggressive, daring and venturesome. First-person accounts emphasize the drama of personal risk:

- 1924 'Discovering the oldest statues in the world! A daring explorer swims thru subterranean river of the Pyrenees and finds rock carvings made 20,000 years ago' (Vol. 46:123)
- 1933 'Air adventures in Peru: cruising among Andean peaks, pilots and cameraman discover wondrous works of an ancient people' (Vol. 63:81)
- 1942 'Discovering Alaska's oldest Arctic town: a scientist finds ivory eyed skeletons of a mysterious people and joins modern Eskimos in dangerous spring whale hunt' (Vol. 82:319)
- 1953 'Hunting prehistory in Panama jungles' (Vol. 104:271)

The implicit involvement of the magazine in promoting these ventures, and the almost universal domination of American archaeologists at these scenes, dramatically illustrate that these riches are Americans' for the taking, and shows Americans as 'right for the job'.

The appeal of exploration and treasure seeking in the magazine depends heavily on high-quality, close-up photographs that heighten the impact of discovery and convey the immediacy of being at the scene. Photographs, too, abbreviate and intensify action, obviating the textual narration for 'readers' who want a fast and dramatic skim of the material. Although most archaeologists recognize that data collection requires patient planning and the often tedious conducting of fieldwork, the archaeologists pictured in *National Geographic Magazine* exhibit extraordinary hyperactivity. Photographs depict archaeologists crawling, clambering, climbing, scaling, burrowing, swimming, diving, slinging sledgehammers, driving dog teams, and more, all in the direct line of duty. A particularly splashy piece in 1963, 'Relics from the rapids' (Vol. 124: 412-35), illustrates the recovery of historic artefacts from a voyageur canoe dump site; the archaeologists are shown splashing and tumbling in the rapids, holding artefacts above their heads and bobbing through chutes and standing waves, an absurdly improbable dramatization of doing archaeology.

But this ruggedness ties archaeologists to other explorers and exemplifies the bold, competitive spirit that made the United States a world power. Moreover, the explorer-archaeologist in *National Geographic Magazine* equates spatial frontiers with scientific frontiers, as Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane suggested (1915, p. 595): The 'absorbing determination [of the American people] to "go forth and find"' is directly linked to learning 'what this land is, what it will yield to research, and *how it may best be used*' [emphasis ours]. Archaeology argues that to gain new knowledge you have to get to new places, and to get there first you have to be tough.

To dramatize the lengths to which archaeologists will go to acquire knowledge, archaeological photographs in *National Geographic* regularly feature context or overview shots that situate sites in the most remote and

challenging locations, surrounded and isolated by jungle or desert, or in the middle of vast spaces without roads or airstrips. Aerial views of Angkor Wat show it standing inviolate in its remote jungle setting (Vol. 161: 554–5); Pueblo Bonito is dwarfed by mesas and buttes stretching in unbroken vastness in all directions (Vol. 162: 555); Mayan caves are photographed from across the river, suggesting one more barrier to their exploration (Vol. 160: 223). Knowledge, again, consists of covering (or uncovering) new ground; greater remoteness means greater knowledge.

National Geographic's coverage of archaeology never dwells on explanations of prehistory or technical aspects of excavation. Rather, the editorial emphasis is on the quest: the quest in which one must be first, and for which one must traverse great distances in order to acquire artefacts, and, above all, the unique artefact. The most frequent photographic image in its articles on archaeology displays the *unique artefact*, torn from its original production and use context and cleared from its recent archaeological matrix. These hand-held or free-standing treasures abound from the earliest to the most recent volumes of the magazine, almost invariably representing whole artefacts (fragments, sherds, flakes, or parts are seldom illustrated). The beauty and costliness of items, the intensity of labour involved in their production, are highlighted; especially common are pieces of jewellery (necklaces, brooches, rings, pins, pendants), elaborately decorated vessels, pots or amphorae, pieces of technological paraphernalia (watches, measuring instruments, tools used in production) – the finest, the first, the biggest, the best. These are the possessions of elite consumers and specialist producers; other classes of material culture from which an archaeologist could construct a typology or derive a seriated sequence are virtually never included. Image after image makes it clear that unique artefacts are the hunted treasure, exaggerating but also distorting the archaeological tendency towards an entirely material representation of the past. Long after the professionals have declared scientific explanation to be the goal of archaeology, *National Geographic Magazine* still promotes an object-centred view of the past.

Humanizing and homogenizing the past

National Geographic also manipulates prehistory and archaeology by investing prehistoric individuals with feelings, personalities, and thoughts, offering 'portraits' of past ways of life, emphasizing first-person narratives of the archaeologist, and juxtaposing photographs of archaeological research with modern natives. Early archaeologists often patronizingly describe the foreign places in which they worked; W. M. Flinders Petrie (1903, p. 359) characterizes Egypt for its 'lawlessness . . . bribery and the suppression of truth'; Hiram Bingham (1915, 1916) notes the prehistoric simplicity of present-day Peruvian primitives. Now increasingly written by staff reporters, articles endeavour to capture professional personalities, scholarly passions, or strong emotions at the time of discovery. In a 1978

article on Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, Dr Heinrich Schliemann and Sir Arthur Evans come alive as 'two brilliant, eccentric and rich men [who] almost single handedly revealed the Bronze Age origins of European civilization to a stunned world' (Vol. 153: 148). Readers are invited to experience the past directly through *National Geographic's* reporting, as when Mary Leakey projects her emotions upon discovering preserved Pliocene footprints:

At one point, and you need not be an expert tracker to discover this, the traveler stops, pauses, turns to the left to glance at some possible threat or irregularity, then continues to the north. This motion, so intensely human, transcends time. Three million seven hundred thousand years ago, our remote ancestor – just as you or I – experienced a moment of doubt. (1985, Vol. 168: 592)

Frequently, the past is made more accessible through the lens of contemporary American concepts, categories, and social relations, homogenizing all pasts to look like ours, and marking all prehistoric events along a timeline of the rise of Western civilization. The ruins of Tiahuanacu in Bolivia are compared to Stonehenge and other European dolmens (1927, Vol. 51: 218); the timescale of strata from Russell Cave in Alabama is correlated to great events in Western civilization, including the landing of the Pilgrims in 1620, the birth of Christ, the construction of Egypt's pyramids, etc. (1956, Vol. 110: 542–58). A 1936 article on Mexican archaeology is entitled 'In the empire of the Aztecs: Mexico City is rich in relics by a people who practiced human sacrifice, yet loved flowers, education and art' (Vol. 71: 725), as though sacrifice and flowers were incongruous in any terms but our own. Everyday life at Russell Cave, Alabama, is depicted in the following terms:

Naked children dash hither and yon about the mouth of the cave, playing the boisterous games of youth. As sunset nears, the men return to divide their kill . . . Soon each family gathers around its fire to eat, laugh, and boast of the day's experiences . . . Only the glow of dying embers testifies that humans are here asleep. Generation after generation life goes on . . . (1958, Vol. 113: 430)

Skeletons are given flesh and evaluated accordingly, as in an article on Herculaneum, where the caption beneath an artist's reconstruction reads, 'Beauty more than skin deep . . . in life she was about 35 years old . . . with a lovely face of rare proportion, perfect teeth and a dainty nose' (1984, Vol. 165: 588–9). Again and again, present-day American values are extended into the past, onto the peoples of the past, appropriated by us to represent us in an earlier state.

The photographs of modern natives also humanize archaeological landscapes, again connecting the past with the present. In the 91 archaeology



Figure 2.1 Maya man, used almost as a scale against a sculptured figure from his glorious past. (Carnegie Institution – *National Geographic Magazine*, January 1925, p. 86.)

articles canvassed in our survey, close to one half of the photographs show modern natives of the country in which the site is located. Natives are often pictured associated with excavations, as workmen or labourers, or used for scale or to point out artefacts or site features. Early photographs of workmen usually cast them as children: 'The men's vitality is remarkable, after a hard day's work excavating they will run home singing and dancing' (1930, Vol. 57: 111), and as exotics: 'A neat hand with a dagger is often a neat hand with a pick. The workmen in the Near East cannot always be selected according to European standards of reliability' (*ibid.*). Since large-scale archaeological projects seem to be *National Geographic's* preference, photographs characteristically feature hundreds of workmen, necessitating some assurance to readers that scientific methods are still in use. Beneath the photograph of an archaeologist perched on a high tower is the caption: 'Though the 250 native workers, soldiers and prisoners displayed habitual good humor, constant diligence was needed to prevent careless handling of precious ancient objects unearthed' (1933, Vol. 64: 126).

Readers are also bombarded with photographic images of 'the Other', the *non-American*, often manipulated to maximize contrast with American lives and values. Frequently, natives with no apparent connection to the archaeological project are posed either standing or striding in front of ruins, human scales for more than the size of archaeological features – scales, too, for differences in the human condition (Fig. 2.1). We are told explicitly that



Figure 2.2 Europeans in suits and hats at the Theseum, Athens. (Keystone Press – *National Geographic Magazine*, September 1916, p. 272.)

these modern natives represent the living, breathing descendants of a glorious past, but the photographs reveal a present-day material impoverishment far below our level of modern American technology. 'Though kingdoms rise and fall, these Kurdish ferrymen carry on' (1930, Vol. 57: 103). Again and again, the equation is made between what is unearthed and a native material culture, between the indigenous technology and what was practised millennia before, between a modern physiognomy and physical characteristics depicted in antiquity. A contrastive photograph juxtaposes dancing figures on a painted prehistoric vessel against modern Cretans: 'Across the gulf of countless generations, the Minoan love of dance still finds expression in Crete where villagers at Lasithi (right) need little excuse to take to their feet' (1978, Vol. 153: 146).

The emphasis is always on the changelessness of backward peoples, even

in the face of modernization coming from the West; picture the photograph with this caption: 'Bedouins, camels, goats, sheep, a happy desert family camp beside a well at Al Jauf. . . A pipeline, gift of Americans who drilled here for oil, leads to a diesel pump. Black goat-hair tents of nomads date back to Biblical times' (1948, Vol. 93: 492). Rich Clarkson (1986), director of photography for the magazine, tells of hiring a camel train and directing its route in front of Egyptian pyramids for one published cover. The message from *National Geographic* is clear: over time, 'they' have progressed so little (or have even retrogressed), while 'we' have come so far, superseding and by implication surpassing the ancient civilizations which they represent. Are not these innocents *with* their ruins quite 'in ruins' themselves?

One significant exception to the patterned pairing of ruins and natives can be observed. In pictures of classical Greek and Roman sites, or clearly Eurocentric sites, raggedy Greek or Italian children or backward-looking natives are notably absent. Instead, a highly evolved European type is consistently paired with his architectural origins, standing in suit and top hat at the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbeck (1912, Vol. 23) or in front of the Theseum in Athens (1916, Vol. 30). These images stress the evolutionary progress of Europeans by contrast with the evolutionary arrest of Others (Fig. 2.2). Decade after decade, classical sites of Greece record changing American fashions as tourists are posed with their 'origins' (1963, Vol. 124; 1980, Vol. 157), while non-European sites exhibit the exotic native in timeless garb. This same distinction is reflected in the treatments accorded to jewellery recovered from the African site of Jenne Jené, modelled by an indigenous African woman, and the jewellery from Herculaneum adorning the neck, arm, and finger of a modern high-fashion blonde model. Supposedly primitive natives are matched with remains from African countries; whites are paired with remains of our own self-declared heritage. In all these comparisons, archaeology becomes a convenient vehicle for examining the exotic 'Other' in relation to ourselves, and for promoting self-congratulatory American well-being. Moreover, by reiterating the primitiveness of peoples from backward lands, and by posing Americans beside the cultural remains they claim as their heritage, the right of Americans to excavate everywhere, to dig anyone's past, is proclaimed and validated.

Selective slants in National Geographic archaeology

Archaeological reporting and imagery in *National Geographic Magazine* are also slanted by systematic geographic, topical, and chronological emphases. Selections are ostensibly guided by Grosvenor's seven sacrosanct editorial principles: topics are to be accurately reported, photogenic, impersonal, of permanent value, non-partisan, non-critical, timely. In fact, the magazine's ideological and nationalistic bent overrides these concerns, distorting archaeological inquiries in various ways.

Throughout the magazine's history, whole continents and subcontinents – Australia, India, China, Southeast Asia and Africa – receive little attention.

Except for the Leakeys' contributions, our sample contains only two archaeological articles on Africa exclusive of Egypt³ (one treats the Roman site of Carthage). South American archaeology is largely restricted to Hiram Bingham's work at Macchu Picchu; Central American archaeology is almost entirely devoted to the Maya. Preponderant coverage is given to archaeological investigations in the Middle East (23 per cent) and Europe (15 per cent). Within these geographic areas, Middle Eastern archaeology in *National Geographic* focuses on biblical history and other antecedents of Western civilization, while European prehistory emphasizes classical Greek and Roman sites. The magazine gives disproportionate attention to the cultural development of Western civilization and to the origins of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

In highlighting these aspects of the archaeological record, it is not surprising that the magazine concentrates on the archaeology of state-level societies. To be sure, early seafaring, temple-building, and biblical states leave behind dramatically photogenic monuments, tombs, and artefactual evidence. But such images make the past appear to be like the present and lead the public to believe that the state has always existed and is the norm as well as the most successful form of social organization. This misrepresentation of the past conveniently gives a time-depth to the American state, underwriting a logic that portrays this system of governance as innately human and intrinsic to the human condition.

The archaeology presented is also dominated by the actions and images of males, reiterating the sexual bias that makes exploration and discovery unambiguously man's work in a man's world. Out of the 74 articles in which the gender of the archaeologist could be identified, only two articles feature female archaeologists, with another five recognizing females as co-partners with males. The naked eye of the camera shows the occasional female participant in archaeology in postures of near repose, seated in the laboratory or sometimes in an excavation unit, often merely observing what is being pointed out to her (Gero 1983, 1985) and never engaged in the frenzied physical action characteristic of males doing 'proper' archaeology. Photographs of male and female co-investigators poring over data show the females recording dictated notes or being shown the niceties of artefacts indicated by the males; yet the captions ('Two doctors look for disease in ancient bones from Crete') clarify that both individuals are in charge of the research (Vols 148: 769 & 159: 219). Inevitably, it is the rugged adult male with his virile vitality who best exemplifies the ethic of aggressive American expansionism that is part and parcel of the *National Geographic* image of the archaeological endeavour.

Images of natives in *National Geographic Magazine* serve to humanize and interpret the past well into the present. After 1950, however, they are overshadowed by images of technological prowess in archaeology, emphasizing a new reliance on scientific technology for uncovering the secrets of the human past. Technological innovations appear soon after their earliest applications in archaeological research: radiocarbon dating is reported in

1950; deep-sea diving advances are frequently presented and continually updated after the early 1960s; computer applications to archaeological reconstructions are featured in 1970. In the international arena, *National Geographic* asserts America's technological superiority, which enables, and even guarantees, accurate interpretation of the archaeological record. The primacy given to scientific technology confirms that those nations possessing sophisticated technology must be at the forefront of geographic and archaeological research. Moreover, images of technological prowess underscore these nations' right to extract and to interpret the archaeological resources of the world, thereby legitimizing American expansionism and the accompanying asymmetrical social relations.

Conclusion

For close to one hundred years, *National Geographic* has played an active role in promulgating a nationalist ideology, presenting a view of the past that promotes technological progress as cultural superiority, expansionism as scientific inquiry for the benefit of humankind, and democratic state systems as inevitable and normative outgrowths of the great civilizations of the ancient Western world. Beginning with Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor in 1915, the editors have claimed an unbiased, objective reporting of the facts; in 1978 Gilbert Melville Grosvenor reasserted that the magazine 'will continue to travel the world unencumbered by ideology . . . as the world goes its way, we will record it, accurately and clearly' (Vol. 153: 1). But the articles identified here reverberate with messages that naturalize the material and social conditions of an expanding capitalist society: the past is represented in objects, particularly exquisite objects associated with prehistoric elites; the lavish material conditions enjoyed by Americans are contrasted with those of other times and other peoples; and prehistory is concentrated into those parts of the globe that illuminate the cultural antecedents of Western industrial society.

Photography is *National Geographic's* principal medium of communication, crucial to its interpretation of archaeology. It is not used, as in archaeological scholarship, to record strata, assemblages, fragments of artefacts, or architectural detail. Instead, it brings into the American living room the exotic 'Other' together with the romance of the undiscovered past, making American expansionism and imperialism picturesque. *National Geographic* graphically illustrates archaeology-as-exploration, turning the discovery of rare resources into high drama and humanistic exchange. Implicitly building on the assertion that photography is precise and accurate, the magazine's photographs guilefully assert the inherent superiority of Euro-American males and the morality of cultural progress. Lessons of power, of national and racial hierarchies, and of the social relations of domination are frozen in the hardware and logic of the photograph (after Haraway 1984-5).

In popularizing archaeology for an American audience, *National Geogra-*

phic distorts archaeological practice by stressing exploration in remote places and the physical demands of field archaeology, overemphasizing the discovery of 'lost' civilizations, opulent artefacts, and bizarre social practices. Its analysis and interpretation of the archaeological record are generally limited to depictions and descriptions of the spectacular remains of prehistory, frequently embellished with characterizations that promote the American mythos. Filtered through a contemporary vision and rationale, *National Geographic's* telling of the past replicates and extends back in time the values and structures of our dominant ideology: Eurocentrism, nationalism, racism, materialism, sexism, and emphasis on state-level society.

It was the opening premise of this chapter that our constructions of the past are mediated by present social contexts and serve a political function in legitimating our social and material conditions of existence. We have argued that *National Geographic's* popularization of archaeology advances a nationalist ideology and legitimizes American expansionism abroad. But how much of this promulgation of American ideology stems from *National Geographic's* popularization of archaeology? And, conversely, how much does the American ideology promulgated by the magazine overlap with the agenda of archaeological scholarship?

North American archaeology and *National Geographic* share a common heritage: both grew out of industrial capitalism and prospered with American imperialism. Archaeology as practised in North America (and Western Europe) is fundamentally a Western science (Hall 1984); its approach to understanding the past is part and parcel of the objectified and commoditized view of the world inherent in the capitalist mode of production. The artefact-laden past portrayed in *National Geographic Magazine* only slightly exaggerates the role of archaeology in Western industrialized society, where units of production and labour and time are measured against a value standardized the whole world over. The material record, the central focus for most archaeological investigations, is often held to represent a distillation of individual, material solutions to problems, such that the past is universally measured in terms of rational utility. The embeddedness of persons and objects in a social world is disjoined by a Western ideology that maintains a natural discontinuity between social and material spheres (Comaroff 1985). It is these commoditized views of the world, integral to scientific archaeology, that are sold to the public by *National Geographic Magazine*.

The past we construct, then, is more than passively conditioned by our political and economic system; it is a direct product of, and an effective vehicle for, that system's ideological messages. As a product of Western logic controlled by Western practice, archaeology reduces the cultural distance between past and present by reifying a commoditized view of the world and the values that support that view. Archaeology as an enterprise legitimizes the hegemony of Western culture and Western imperialism and imposes a congruent view onto the past, one that is ably promoted by successful media such as *National Geographic*.

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Notes

- 1 The Board of Trustees for the National Geographic Society in 1960, for example, included the Director of the National Park Service, the Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Director Emeritus of the National Bureau of Standards, the Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, the former Director of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, as well as the Chairman of the Board of Riggs National Bank, the Honorary Board Chairman of Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co., and the Vice President (retired) of the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. This roster of military, economic, and scholarly interests is typical of decades of National Geographic Society Boards of Trustees.
- 2 Throughout this chapter, all references to volumes without authors are citations from particular issues of *National Geographic Magazine*.
- 3 Egypt is considered here as part of the Middle East.

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