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Archaeological research has been influenced by feminist thought and critique for decades. In the early 1990s, new narratives began to be written about the past. Starting with a search for women and gendered identities in our prehistories, these have developed into a new way of understanding the relationships between people, objects and animals, both in the past and in the present. Archaeological research has been concerned with the relationships between the ‘human’ and the ‘other’ for a number of decades, whether they involve nonhuman animals, objects we use and create, or attitudes to the landscape and environment. The nonhuman, in other words, is central to our work. We hope in this piece to demonstrate the contribution archaeological insights could make to feminist theorising about the nonhuman.

The feminist legacy within archaeology

Until recently, women’s social roles, gender relations and sexuality were not valued topics of archaeological research. Hetero-normative, family-oriented gender roles were considered ‘natural’ and therefore ubiquitous in societies of the recent and ancient past. A shift in archaeological theory during the 1990s led to a critique of these assumptions, with the recognition that previous interpretations had not acknowledged gendered individuals. With this new wave of feminist thinking, a self-reflexive approach to archaeology emphasised the need to ‘people’ the past, encouraging the recognition of ‘individuals’ (including gendered persons) in the material record. This shift accompanied feminist thought and critique which the discipline was beginning to take on board, leading to the recognition that the people

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in the past we were studying, especially women, had been transformed by archaeologists into 'faceless blobs' (Tringham, 1991). The need to re-populate the past with women and other gendered individuals began to transform archaeological interpretation. The term 'individual' itself has subsequently also been critiqued, with notions of alternative and plural 'dividual' subjectivities becoming more widely used (see for example, Fowler, 2004; Casella and Fowler, 2005; Croucher, 2010). Re-examining what it means to be human opens up new understandings of the baroque relationships and networks that exist between people, objects and nonhumans: suggesting that persons are both affected and constituted by the ties which entangle them with their material environments.

In archaeology, we are often missing the people we are studying, leaving us to recreate the past, and its inhabitants, from the material engagements evident in our archaeological data. Our challenge has been to begin with the material remnants, the products of creation, technology and exchange, and to create narratives around these objects and material remains which constitute our interpretations of past lives. In effect, we encounter the opposite challenge to scholars in other disciplines who start with people, society and/or language: we necessarily begin with the material and nonhuman.

For archaeologists, material objects are intricately bound up with the social world. As famously discussed by Mauss ([1924] 1990) and later by Appadurai (1988) and Ingold (2007), objects are rarely meaningless or simply functional, but affect humans and emotions, reinforcing and reflecting relationships. Objects are not merely instantiations of past technology, but are embedded with meanings that can inform our understandings of people in the past, their networks and relationships (Casella and Fowler, 2005). Our archaeological datasets are usually incomplete, owing to preservation, disturbance, or simply the result of digging in the wrong place! However, as well as learning from absences, archaeology has techniques to deal with incomplete datasets. We have learnt to embrace ambiguity in our data, including the meaning and use of past artefacts and how we interpret their presence, patterns and contexts. Some case studies will illustrate this approach.

On the ambiguities of material identity

In the Late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic in Ancient Mesopotamia (c.6, 500–5,000 BC¹), the precursors of our modern systems of monetary exchange, property and ownership are thought to begin to materialise. Namely, we have the emergence of tokens and seals, the former thought to be representational objects, the latter a means of marking property, through the application of a seal impression into wet clay or plaster, or with pigment. Whilst this traditional, administrative interpretation may seem adequate, alternatives are possible. The material composition of the tokens and seals is significant: made from clay, stone, or volcanic obsidian, they required crafting, the manipulation of material by the human actor which affected both the material and the maker. Often time was spent polishing these items, and

the aesthetic qualities of many seals is apparent even today (Figure 1). The raw materials may have been brought from some distance and the source itself may have held importance. Similarly, factors such as colour (see Giles, 2008b; Jones and Macgregor, 2002; Gaydarska and Chapman, 2008), raw material and the final 'feel' of the object are likely to have been chosen, rather than arbitrary factors. So whilst their use may have been administrative in purpose, the objects communicate much more than this. They were personal objects worn and carried about the body, closely tied up with identity and, it seems, frequently symbolising the person in their exchanges and application to other objects. So, we begin to see ambiguities in their use. They were entwined with the personhood of the wearer/owner, and carried consequential meanings in their exchange. The tokens and seals are evidence of networks, not just among people, but made up of inalienable objects (Mauss, [1924] 1990) being transferred and moved around the landscape. The same ambiguities can also be seen with labrets, worn through the lip, which so closely resemble tokens they produce difficulties for classification. It becomes apparent that our categories of artefacts and analysis are limited. Is an item a token or a labret? Can it be both? Can it be both worn and exchanged? Such questions, beginning with the material and working back to the human, ultimately reveal an entwining of human and material. The artefacts were representative and constitutive of relationships and negotiations.

Comparable conversations about objects have emerged in a vastly different arena of archaeological study. Excavations at the Ross Female Factory, a 19th century British colonial prison in Tasmania, Australia, for example, recovered an assortment of bone, shell and ferrous metal buttons hidden within the earthen floors of the solitary cellblock (Figure 2). Interpreted as trade tokens, these objects circulated within the convict black market, providing the material means for convict women not only to maintain access to desired luxuries (tea, sugar, alcohol, tobacco), but to also sustain illicit same-sex intimate encounters between prison inmates (Casella, 2000). Within this carceral world, these buttons suggest the simultaneous dynamics of objectified sexuality and sexualised materiality through the act of object exchange (Casella, 2007).

Ultimately, the nature of personhood is frequently ambiguous, with human and material relationships manipulated, sustained and expressed through interactions with the material world. Our article so far has focussed on whole objects; however, it is becoming apparent that fragments of things can hold importance and meaning for theorising human and nonhuman engagements. As mentioned above, studies of personhood in archaeology have begun to explore 'relational identities' (Brück, 2005; Fowler, 2001, 2004; Giles, 2008a), whereby human subjectivities are intimately entwined with other people, objects and animals. Specifically, the concept of dividual identities and work on the significance of 'inalienable objects' (objects that retain the essence of the giver after the act of exchange (Mauss, [1924] 1990)) have led to new interpretations of fragmentation as a paradox within the archaeological record (Chapman, 2000; Brück, 2005). While those objects believed to be inalienable are broken and circulated, they often retain meaning derived from their



Figure 1. Seal stamp, Mesopotamia, Late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic period. Photo by S. Campbell.

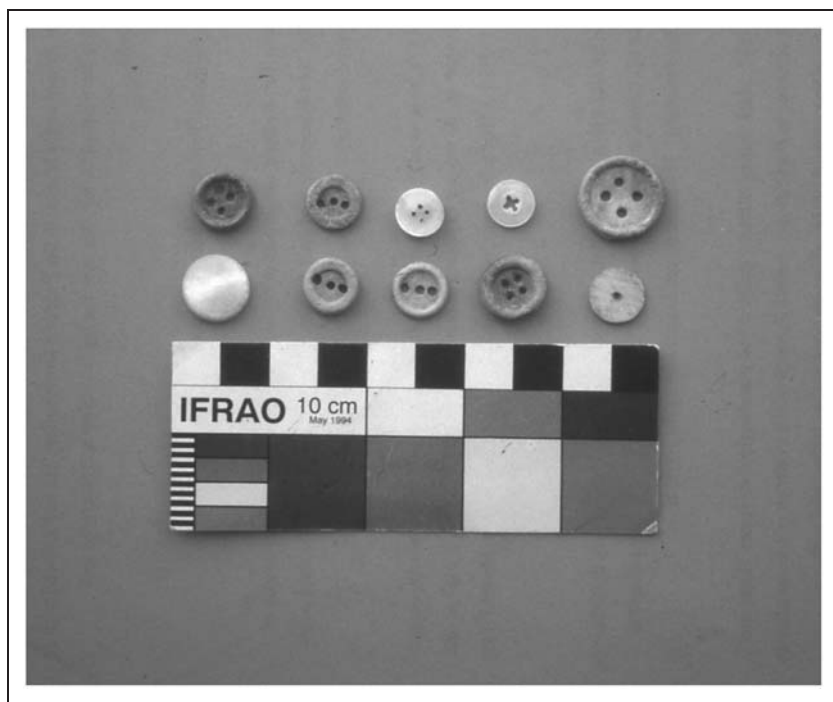


Figure 2. Buttons recovered from Solitary Cells, Ross Female Factory historic site, Tasmania (Australia), mid-19th century. Photo by E. Casella, 1998.

relationship to the original whole. Conversely, the act of destruction may equally mark the transformation of social relationships. As material items are components of their gendered networks, at certain times these relationships are altered through the breaking, circulation and/or deposition of fragmented objects.

Death, burial and the creation of non-persons

Crucially, the same can be true of bodies, which goes some way to explaining the overlapping of persons and non-persons through the circulation of body parts seen at many sites in the Neolithic Near East (*c.* 8,500–5,500 BC) (Croucher, 2010). Bones, literally once parts of persons, were repeatedly circulated and exchanged, as the human body was fragmented after death. This was also a practice seen with nonhuman bodies, in the form of clay figurines and human-shaped vessels, which were frequently found decapitated, or in the case of a vessel from Yarim Tepe II, deliberately smashed in the same area of the site as burial pits. The body is not only recreated out of clay, it is intentionally destroyed. In some cases, parts of bodies were actively incorporated into substances. For instance, a plate, deliberately

smashed at the closure of a mortuary building (the Skull Building) at Çayönü Tepesi, had included bone as temper within the clay. Whilst we are unaware if this was animal or human bone, it is clear that the body was incorporated into the material, producing an ambiguous metamorphosis of body and substance. This evidence, we suggest, crumbles our subject categories, whether person, animal or object.

Archaeology provides material evidence that relationships between human and nonhuman animals were fundamentally different to those experienced today, suggesting that animals and people were linked, conceptually and ultimately physically through the acts of mortuary deposition. At Kfar HaHoresh in the Southern Levant, c.7,500 BC (Goring-Morris, 2005), for example, we see the repeated deposition of humans and animals within funerary contexts. Human and animals buried together, not simply as individual entities, but with their body parts mingled and entwined. There is a repeated mixing and manipulating of bodies in the mortuary domain. Children are buried with fox mandibles; people and gazelles are repeatedly buried together, their body parts entwined. A headless gazelle, for example, was buried with a human cranium which had been covered with plaster, its facial features recreated, although altered, on the long-dead cranium. Such entities can be seen as occupying a place which is neither body nor object, but an ambiguous category incorporating the two. There is also evidence of a repeated process of retrieving the skull or cranium sometime after death and burial. It was subsequently plastered, painted, or both, before a period of use and display, and eventually reburial. Here we can see the human body as a different kind of 'material'. Although still representing material ties and networks between people and things, it is linked to ancestors and/or a spirit world through later mortuary deposition, particularly when associated with animal burials.

In many cases, particular species of nonhuman animals played a significant role. In Domuztepe's Death Pit (Anatolia, c.5,500 BC), a mortuary feature involved the disarticulation and further fragmentation of around 40 people, as well as cattle and dogs (Kansa and Campbell, 2004). Whilst other animals were included, there was a repeated pattern of treatment of human and dog remains, with a consistent selection of skull and long bones (a pattern that is reversed with cattle remains). A specific human/nonhuman relationship thus appears through the evidence, where canines were apparently regarded in a comparable manner to their human counterparts, perhaps attributed with personhood and certainly significant enough to warrant inclusion in this funerary event, as participants that were, unlike their cattle counterparts, not there as food.

The evidence leads us to further interpretations; this funerary event no doubt affected the human and nonhuman participants, evoking emotion (Tarlow, 2000), creating memory, and for those that outlived the dead here, creating mnemonic triggers for future engagements with each other, and with other, future, human/nonhuman entanglements. Experiences surrounding these events would have been tactile, sensory, and affective, as the living interacted with and processed the

remains of human and nonhuman animals (Croucher and Campbell, 2009), as well as depositing material items within the Death Pit. Pottery that had been sliced prior to firing had been included, as were pot shards which resembled portions of skulls. They were not arbitrarily placed, but constitute intentional depositions of person, object, nonhuman. It is from these remains that we build up a picture of past lives, where, as others have observed, human/material engagements were manipulated and negotiated in various places in the landscape (Cochrane, 2006/2007; Harris, 2009).

It becomes clear that our notions of natural and cultural differ from those in the past (Boyd, 2004; Descola and Palsson, 1996; MacCormack and Strathern, 1980; Ortner, 1974). As in our contemporary worlds, people lived lives that entangled and merged these categories, combining human, nonhuman and material identities (Conneller, 2004), albeit in vastly different ways than experienced in Western modernity. Although these relationships, the boundaries that Vicki Kirby (2009) describes as the 'cultural' in the 'natural', are conflated, we realise from the archaeological record that these are *our* categorisations and distinctions, rather than universally understood concepts. The humans we study were entwined with their networks of objects, places and nonhuman animals; equally, all of these categories of 'otherness' are ultimately constructed in relation to persons.

Archaeology can offer new 'knowledge' about personhood, and earlier networks of materials, people and nonhumans. The act of archaeological interpretation promotes self-reflexivity: we deconstruct ourselves and our own relationships as we study past lives and their impact on our own humanness, nonhumanness and materiality. Both as a practice and as a set of knowledges, then, archaeology has much to offer feminists theorising the nonhuman.

Note

1. All dates here are BC cal, that is the radio-carbon date has been calibrated, in line with conventions in Near Eastern Archaeology.

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