

Introduction

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'History is written by the winners', says Robert Paynter in 'Afro-Americans in the Massachusetts historical landscape' (Ch. 4). This is frequently the case; those in power often write accounts of the past to justify the status quo. What has actually taken place, an amorphous ragbag of happenings and attitudes, becomes in the eyes of its interpreters the logical and smoothed-out antecedent of things as they now are. But historical interpretations are never absolute. The struggles between contending versions therefore offer great opportunities for archaeology, which can often reveal new evidence about the past. In theory and, as much of this book demonstrates, increasingly also in practice, archaeology can help to ensure that history is not written only by the winners. It is said that when Jack Golson, an archaeologist at the Australian National University, advertised a lecture in Port Moresby entitled '50 000 years of Papua New Guinea history' (the evidence for which was mainly archaeological), people trekked for miles to hear him. Hitherto, history had been about white people. Now it would be about everybody.

It is the existence of archaeology worldwide, particularly its growing practice in the Third and Fourth Worlds, that makes discussion of 'the politics of the past' so fruitful. The topic is inherent in any comprehensive examination of archaeological interpretation which extends beyond Eurocentric models; megalithic comparisons are no longer based on Stonehenge, ethnographic parallels do not require a Greenwich meridian. This book draws much on material from Africa, North America, Oceania, and Australia, and only to a lesser extent from Europe. It is divided into four parts, entitled 'The Heritage of Eurocentricity', 'Rulers and Ruled', 'Politics and Administration', and 'Archaeology and the People'. Each has a short introduction summarizing its contents. David Lowenthal's concluding chapter highlights some of the interconnections among these four themes.

One issue common to many chapters is how social, cultural, political, psychological, and ideological factors constrain archaeological objectivity, especially when the results of research are put before the public. An instructive example is the view of history offered by the *National Geographic Magazine* over the past 100 years (Gero & Root, Ch. 2). Here the orientation, aimed largely at North American readers, essentially reflects the assumptions of the magazine's readership. But constraints placed on archaeology can be directly economic. Thus archaeology on Easter Island (Rapu, Ch. 18) is undertaken primarily for its money-earning capacity in the growing tourist market. In the Solomon Islands (Foanaota, Ch. 17), the

extent to which the National Museum can maintain its National Site Survey (the bedrock of its archaeological research) depends much on aid from international agencies such as Unesco and from such friendly governments as Australia and Japan. Culture queues up for assistance, just as do public works. Money or the lack of it also helps determine the effectiveness of museums in Botswana (MacKenzie, Ch. 15, Grant, Ch. 16). Cost-effectiveness lay behind the decision to create the Jorvik Viking Centre in York (Addyman, Ch. 20), and determines the areas emphasized in archaeological atlases (Scarre, Ch. 1).

Another general theme, transcending our categories, is the nature of historical knowledge. When Butts (Ch. 8), then curator of the Hawke's Bay Museum, New Zealand, redisplayed its Maori collection, he fully involved members of the Ngati Kahungunu tribe to ensure that their own conception of their history was presented. Conflicting interpretations of historical realities are considered under several heads. Blakey (Ch. 3) and Paynter (Ch. 4) discuss bias against Afro-Americans in museum displays and in American historical archaeology, and Belgrave (Ch. 5) deplores the absence of Anglo-Caribbeans from areas of British history. From a feminist stance, Jones & Pay (Ch. 12) criticize male control of the archaeological and museum professions, which restricts the status of women within their ranks, and interprets history in ways that marginalize women's roles.

Several chapters are concerned to a greater or lesser extent with the effects of wars: in Europe in the 1940s, in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970, and today in the Lebanon. Partisan interpretations of history to justify each side's actions can be instanced in Biafra (Nicklin, Ch. 23) and Beirut (Seeden, Ch. 11). But in this century partisanship finds its most ruthless expression in fascism. As Mikołajczyk explains (Ch. 19), in 1939 the Łódź Museum in central Poland became an explicit instrument of pan-German propaganda. The wider political and ideological settings of Nazi interpretations of the Germanic past are discussed by McCann (Ch. 6).

The use of the media to publicize, inform, educate, cajole, and elucidate is another interconnecting topic. In West Africa, according to Nzewunwa (Ch. 14), all the media are under-utilized in the development of the role of archaeology in education. Spriggs (Ch. 9) argues that Hawaiian newspapers have politically crystallized rescue archaeology, attitudes towards burial sites, and the bearing of archaeological discoveries on indigenous traditional beliefs. Besides informing the public and influencing politicians, the press has given a platform to Hawaiian nationalists and forces archaeologists to reconsider their interpretations in the context of contemporary political issues.

Given this array of influences on the constituents and expression of historical knowledge, the reader might wonder whether archaeological interpretation is any more than a recurrent exercise in subjectivity. This issue certainly shaped Ucko's original conception of the World Archaeological Congress:

I wanted to show that a world archaeological approach to archaeology as a 'discipline' revealed how subjective archaeological interpretation has always been. . . . Discussion would focus not only on the conscious manipulation of the past for national political ends (as did Smith's Rhodesian regime with Great Zimbabwe or the Nazis with their racist use of archaeology), but also on the way archaeologists themselves have been influenced in their interpretation by the received wisdom of their times. (Ucko 1987, pp. 31-2)

To be sure, many outside influences, emotional as much as intellectual, are bound to affect all interpretation. But these influences do not deprive archaeologists of choice. Certain preconceived attitudes may condition interpretation in a restrictive and negative fashion, but others can have a reverse effect, offering insights of great potential value. It is wrong to regard archaeological interpretation as little more than subjective idiosyncrasy. Interpretation is an active process of mind, in which evidence is tested against current theories. Practice and theory continually interrelate to generate fresh hypotheses.

Thus although hypothetically one interpretation may be as valid as another, their relative validity can be subjected to unlimited testing. Although some archaeologists might argue that subjectivity makes the discipline unstable or even directionless, in my view the co-existence of a wide range of interpretations indicates vitality and signals future growth. The global scope of the subject, of which this book is one indication, enhances this view. The more interpretive options available, the greater the likelihood of correcting bias and eliminating error. Hence it is important, on both philosophical and pragmatic grounds, to emphasize archaeology's links with anthropology and history, since they all draw on a common stock of cultural experiences. This emphasis is particularly relevant to the charge, often reiterated in this book, that archaeology's historical origins and pro-Western roles deprive it of integrity. 'There can be no doubt that your science of archaeology is white organised, white dominated, and draws its values and techniques from a European and Anglo-American culture and devotes much of its time to the study of non-white people,' says the Australian Aborigine, Rosalind Langford. 'As such it has within it a cultural bias which has historically formulated an equation between non-white races and primitiveness' (quoted in Creamer, Ch. 10, p. 133).

It is undeniable that archaeology's biases derive from its Western origins and inherited preconceptions. But is it so constituted as to be incapable of learning from experience to correct them? As this book makes clear, some archaeologists now welcome the challenge of alternative explanations to received wisdoms. The recognition as well as interpretation of archaeological evidence will always be biased and incomplete. There can be no archaeologically achieved final truths or wholly objective interpretations. But to recognize such limitations is not to reduce the subject to a set of mere perceptual constructs. Archaeology is a societal activity that embodies both

the residues of its past and its changing attitudes towards that past. We call the residues evidence and the attitudes interpretations. The continuing dialogue between the two enables archaeology, always open to new questions, at the same time always to reveal new knowledge.

Reference

Ucko, P. J. 1987. *Academic freedom and apartheid: the story of the World Archaeological Congress*. London: Duckworth.

THE HERITAGE OF EUROCENTRICITY