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IRRESPONSIBILITY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Many scholars believe that since the emergence of “New Archaeology” in America and Britain in the mid-1960s, lively and widespread interest has developed in theoretical aspects of archaeology. This trend has been most marked in the United States and Great Britain, but has also been active in other countries, such as Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, and Czechoslovakia. Especially welcome in the field today is an interest of many scholars in bringing new theoretical approaches to bear on the ever-expanding database. In fact, development of new theoretical aspects in archaeology is the most important character of “New Archaeology”. In “New Archaeology”, scholars argued that archaeological reasoning should be made explicit. Conclusions should be based not simply on the personal authority of the scholar making the interpretation, but on an explicit framework of logical argument.

The aim of this paper is twofold, to identify and to criticize irresponsibility in archaeology in the age of reason. The potential for irresponsibility in old archaeology is greater than in “New Archaeology”. The paper will thus use the problem of irresponsibility and its figure to investigate the play between seduction and authority. It will point to the blurring of borders between the respectable and the “pseudo” archaeologists.

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Introduction

Mathew Johnson on the first page of his book, titled “Archaeological Theory: An Introduction”, challenges an important question. He states, “Archaeology can be very boring, distressing and physically uncomfortable. Every year we excavate thousands of sites, some with painstaking and mind-numbing patience, and some in a great and undignified hurry. Every year we get chilled to the marrow or bitten half to death by mosquitoes while visiting some unprepossessing, grassy mound in the middle of nowhere. Miles from decent restaurant or even warm bath, we try to look interested while the rain comes down in sheets and some great professor whose best work was 20 years ago witters on in a monotone about what was found in Trench 4B. Every year we churn out thousands of interminable, stultifying dull with site reports, fretting over the accuracy of plans and diagrams, collating lists of grubby artifacts to go on microfiche that few will ever consult or use again. Why?” (Johnson 1999, 1). He continues, “The question ‘why do we do

archaeology?’ is therefore bound up with the question ‘why is archaeology – the study of the past through its material remains – so important to us?’ And this again leads on to the question of “us”, of our identity – *who are we?* And these are all theoretical questions” (Johnson 1999, 2). The most important point in his view is the reconstruction of the past. This is also the main aim of archaeology, to answer questions about our identity. It seems, that the answer to this question – *who are we?* – helps us to have a better future. If we believe in human–environment interactions, then we will believe that similar environment needs similar human behaviors. Therefore, learning our ancestors’ experience could help us to make a better future. To have a better future based on our ancestors’ experiences, we need to extract their behaviors from archaeological data properly, because it is a result of their endeavors in unreliable environment.

In archaeology, theory has been defined as the conceptual basis of studying material data from the past (Dark 1995, 1); therefore, it is completely subjective (Shanks & Tilley 1987, 212). In culture-historical archaeology, it simply represented the knowledge that material remains could inform archaeologists about the past (Dark 1995, 3 ff.). Hodder believes that although culture-historical archaeology contained theoretical assumptions, it remained a methodology rather than a theory (Hodder 1991, 4). But it seems that culture history is also a form of archaeological theory, in which archaeologists use inductive reasoning. Describing and classifying finds into groups are important parts of culture-history theory. In contrast, theory in the “New Archaeology” tries to explain change and recognize the process by which it came about. Therefore, it represents an important movement from the main traditions of archaeology, in which description was considered more important than the explanation of change (Dark 1995, 3 ff.). Shanks and Tilley believe that although theory is not a technical outcome of a specialist, it is a surrounded and localized production, and the way in which archaeologists manage to arrive at a particular picture of the past based on the archaeological remains (Shanks & Tilley 1987, 212 f.).

In fact, archaeologists have an admirable series of responsibilities; firstly it is the responsibility to interpret the data they discovered to the best of their abilities. They should care about the outcomes of their interpretations of the people and places they study, and they should deem the environmental impact of the processes that they do on the world. Therefore, we need to know four reasons of why theory is ‘relevant’ to archaeological practice “1 – we need to justify what we do”, “2 – we need to evaluate one interpretation of the past against another, to decide which is the stronger”, 3 – “we must be explicit in what we do as archaeologists”, “4 – we don’t ‘need’ theory, we all use theory whether we like it or not” (Johnson 1999, 3 ff.).

Archaeological theories and theoretical archaeologists

It might be repetitive to talk about the history of archaeological theories, because many archaeologists have talked about this issue in their articles.

Nowadays all archaeologists are more or less familiar with the changes in archaeological theories. They know that before the emergence of “New Archaeology” in 1960, culture-history was a dominant perspective (Hodder et al. 1995, 243). In fact, the century before 1960 was the “long sleep” of archaeological theory, in which very little explicit discussion of theory took place (Johnson 1999, 15). Culture history’s failure to answer the “how” and “why” of past events was due to its mono-causal explanations and the descriptive level of this framework. Together these factors caused the emergence of “New Archaeology”. We all know that processual perspective, which has received a positivist and anthropological position, rose from the “New Archaeology” of the 1960s and early 1970s (Hodder et al. 1995, 243).

The processual perspective of explanation is represented by the study of character of what is ambiguously referred to as the cultural historical process (McNairn 1980, 105; O’Brien & Lyman 2000, 164). Positivism has had strong implications for the manner in which archaeologists interpret the archaeological record. Through its paradigm of natural science, the past is imbued with “naturalism”, in that social phenomena are regarded like natural phenomena: society is treated as a second nature (Hodder et al. 1995, 243). Therefore this perspective imported a form of strong positivism, which differs from the traditional descriptive format (Preucel 1991, 26; Hodder et al. 1995, 241). Processualists, who reject historically-specific explanation (Dark 1995, 188), tried to explain archaeological cultures more holistically, as organic, functioning systems, which could be analysed in terms of social structure, organisation and adaptation (Fuller & Boivin 2002, 160). Changes in processual perspective, which attempted to explain archaeological material through the scientific anthropology (Whitley 1998, 3), became a process rather than an event (Fuller & Boivin 2002, 160).

We also know that due to the dissatisfaction of some archaeologists with the processual approach, post-processualism emerged at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s (Dark 1995, 10). The post-processual movement, which arose largely outside the United States (Patterson 1990, 192; Whitley 1998, 2), is actually a reaction and supersession of the processual framework (Shanks & Hodder 1998, 69). As pointed out, at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, this approach appeared due to the dissatisfaction of some archaeologists (Dark 1995, 10) with the standard positivist concept, an anxiety for recapturing the characteristic human qualities of the past and a concern for the use of the archaeological data in the present. Therefore, this replacement of positivism with post-positivism made post-processual archaeology an anti-science and explored interpretive framework (Whitley 1998, 6). In post-processual archaeology, a simplistic positivism that disregards the contemporary social influences on archaeological interpretation cannot be sustained as a philosophical framework for archaeology (Fuller & Boivin 2002, 178). This perspective, which questions the foundation of objective studies (Boivin & Fuller 2002, 191), celebrates subjectivity and the historical particular (Hodder 1986, 153; Shanks & Hodder 1998, 69). The difference between objective and subjective is the difference between fact and opinion. Facts are

objective and probably true; however, if no clear facts exist about a topic, then a series of balanced opinions needs to be produced to allow the reader to make up his or her mind; opinions are subjective ideas held by individuals and so are always biased. These two issues have been criticized by Marxist archaeologists, they question either them or their oppositions such as subjectivity and objectivity (Johnson 1999, 94).

The weakness of processual archaeology appeared from the beginning of this approach. Because archaeologists, who are working in this perspective, believe that it is difficult to dig up a social system, ideology, a kinship terminology and a philosophy (Binford 1962, 218 f.). Furthermore, it is very difficult to reconstruct the social organisation and ideology of a society (Trigger 1968, 10). This is the most important reason for them to deny processual archaeology. The post-processual archaeology, which identifies itself as an interpretative perspective (Shanks & Hodder 1998, 70) and is in opposition to processualism (Chippindale 1993, 27; Boivin & Fuller 2002, 191), emphasizes the subjectivity and historical particular (Hodder 1986, 153; Shanks & Hodder 1998, 69); anti-science and objectivity (Shanks & Hodder 1998, 69; Boivin & Fuller 2002, 191); symbolism, ideology (Boivin & Fuller 2002, 193); relative position (Whitley 1998, 2) and highlights the plurality of events and individuality (Hodder 1986, 149; Dark 1995, 188).

Richard Gould states that one of the dictums of archaeology is that every site is unique. The principles and basic practices of archaeology are fairly straightforward, but their effective application in specific situations can be a challenge whenever complex depositional and cultural processes have intervened. Also, past human behavior sometimes has no modern counterpart. Archaeologists need to be ready to recognize such occurrences and to account for them as fully as the evidence allows without making prior assumptions and with as little bias as possible (Gould 2007, 4). Therefore, archaeologists often debate the nature of the archaeological record; whether it is 'transformed' material culture or a 'text' to be read by them (Patrick 1985). Archaeologists should be aware of the theories and methods that they apply in their studies. They have to know details of their theories to select the preferred one in their studies, as different questions need different approaches and debates.

Responsibility vs. irresponsibility

What we conceive from the history of Archaeological Theories is that Theoretical Archaeologists have tried to apply different approaches in their studies. With the emergence of a new approach, its followers tried to deny the previous approach. They just saw the weakness of the latter; however they were sometimes using some aspect of the previous approach. For example, archaeologists in post-processual framework believe that processual archaeology is not able to re-construct social organisation, religious and symbolic behaviors (Binford 1962, 218 f.; Trigger 1968, 10). They are anti-science and against positivism

(Shanks & Hodder 1998, 69; Boivin & Fuller 2002, 191). But it is clear that they may sometimes use science to explain materials or they may need to describe their context.

Therefore, a combination of description, explanation and interpretation may help us to reconstruct past societies (Fig. 1). The purpose of description is to re-create or visually present a site, artefact, event, or action so that the reader may picture what is being described. Therefore, it could be the first step in archaeological studies. Explanation is a way to uncover new knowledge, and to report relationships among different aspects of studied phenomena. Interpretation is an approach to understand the meaning of a vague issue. In fact, archaeologists are literally stuck between a rock and a hard place when it comes to the interpretation of archaeological data. Archaeology is also an attempt to reconstruct belief systems, rituals and habits. Different questions need different approaches; therefore, using new approaches does not mean that the previous approaches were useless. For example, Middle-Range Theory may answer some questions in particular contexts, but it may not be able answer other questions; in this case, it does not mean this approach is useless. Sometimes, we may use ethnography to answer our questions; in another context we may apply ethnology to answer different questions. Therefore, different questions require different frameworks and approaches to achieve appropriate answers.

Since the emergence of the “New Archaeology” in the 1960s, different approaches were applied to reconstruct the human past. It is interesting that pioneers of the new approaches were generally members of the previous approaches; as they

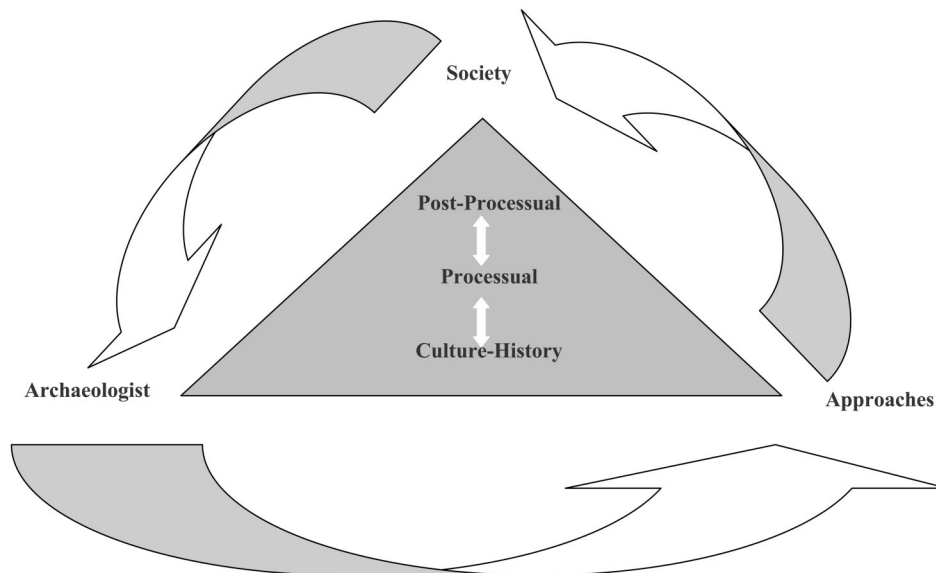


Fig. 1. Showing a combination of different approaches to reconstruct society.

knew the weakness of the old approaches, they tried to introduce a new method. Nowadays, archaeologists in all countries are familiar with different approaches; they know their strength and weakness. Therefore, here are questions that remain to be answered:

If they know different approaches,

1. Why do they not use useful approaches in their studies?
2. Why are they irresponsible in their studies when they are aware of the new approaches?
3. Are the new approaches so difficult?
4. Or is the old fashion so easy?
5. They may know the strength of the new approaches, but why are they still employing their old methods?

To answer the above questions, we should bear in mind that we have archaeologists in Iran who may be aware of different methods, but when they work in the field and find materials that reject their hypothesis, they try to hide those materials. Because they believe that rejection of their hypothesis is not good. This paper believes that rejection of a hypothesis is also a scientific behavior. There are many archaeologists who claim that they are following a scientific way, but when one looks at their works, it seems that they are cheating, because they want their hypothesis to be proved.

The three perspectives, including Culture-History, Processual and Post-Processual, dealt with a wide variety of explanations, including diffusion, migration, invasion, convergence and divergence in cultural history; population increase, environment, resource utilisation, social complexity and trade in processual; and Marxism, structuralism, idealism, feminist critiques and public archaeology in post-processual (Hodder 1986, 152 ff.). It is interesting that with such a review in the previous section, it becomes increasingly apparent that archaeological explanation is based on theories and hypotheses rather than absolute certainty. For example, explanation in a culture-historical perspective is based on inductive concept, whereas in processual approaches it is based on deduction (Hester & Grady 1982, 90; Renfrew & Bahn 2001). In an inductive perspective the premises include no more information than the conclusions, consequently, the truth of the conclusion does not essentially come from the truth of the premises. In a deductive aspect, when a conclusion is true, the premise has to be true, because the conclusion of a deductive inference includes no more information than the premises, and the conclusion logically comes from the premises. Therefore, it is possible for the conclusion of an inductive aspect to be false, while the premise is true (Watson et al. 1984, 5).

How much have we considered the importance of context in archaeology? If the aim of archaeology is to reconstruct behavior of the human past, we need to understand the importance of context, and we have to discover the context properly, and then interpret it systematically. In order to reconstruct past human activities at a site, it is crucially important to understand the context of a find, whether artefact, feature, structure, inorganic or organic remains. A find's context

consists of its immediate matrix (the material surrounding it, usually some sort of sediment such as gravel, sand or clay), its provenience (horizontal and vertical position within the matrix), and its association with other finds (occurrence together with other archaeological remains, usually in the same matrix) (Renfrew & Bahn 2001, 50).

As stated above, after the emergence of the “New Archaeology”, new methods were also applied. In this paper, it is believed that old approach is also useful, but when archaeologists could use new methods to get answers, they still used old-fashioned methods. For example, an Iranian archaeologist was working on Sidon’s samples to reconstruct the ancient diet of Sidon People (Mosapour Negari 2003). Before she started analysis (isotope carbon and nitrogen), she was informed that she would find that marine food is the main diet of this people. This idea was based on information about the location of site which is a port on the eastern Mediterranean Sea. But when she finished her analysis, she found that the people of Sidon had eaten vegetables, meat and terrestrial food, but not marine food. So this result persuades her to continue the research and to understand who they were. Native people of Sidon or traders? This example, which is based on author experience shows that personal view is not reliable, when scientific methods could be applied.

Sometimes, archaeologists are unable to reconstruct the human past, because they do not consider the context. Or they may see the context, but they are not able to understand logical relations between the finds. Generically and specifically, the most important weakness of this kind of archaeologists (Culture-Historical Archaeologists) is that they are unable to explain archaeological evidence according to multi-causal explanations. In mono-causal explanations, archaeologists do not consider the context, they just gather materials, and then send them to museum. A context could be a system, which may be defined as a series of structures in which there are relationships between the structures and their essential parts. It may also be defined as an intercommunicating network of essential parts or units forming a complex whole (Watson et al. 1984, 68). For this reason, it is necessary to study a context as a whole, not just the pottery, metal or any other materials, and we have to be responsible for all finds in a context.

Conclusion

In an inductive perspective archaeologists are lost within their materials that were not sampled systematically, and that is why in this perspective the premises include no more information than the conclusions, while in deductive perspective, archaeologists sample and study the materials, and therefore, the conclusion comes logically from the premises. For archaeologists with old methods it is easier to arrange the data like a puzzle to learn about the past, while archaeologists with new approaches learn to discover how to reconstruct the past. Traditional archaeologists do not try to change their old methods and this is irresponsibility in archaeology. They have the conclusion at first, then they

produce questions and hypotheses from their conclusion. For them, it is not scientific to see that their hypotheses are rejected, while for an archaeologist with a new approach, the rejection of a hypothesis is also a scientific result. He is not worried about the result, when he has followed the correct procedure. Johnson describes Culture-historians as archaeologists who focused on collecting masses of archaeological materials within an unquestioned, generally assumed framework (Johnson 1999, 15), and this might be due to their irresponsibility to the context.

In my view, archaeologists should spend much of their time trying to understand the importance of an occasion in time. In fact, the most important aim of the study of archaeology is to increase the understanding of the human past. Archaeologists should try to answer the 'How' and 'Why' of the past events, not just 'What'. Therefore, if our goal in archaeology is to know more about the human past, there remains the major issue of what we expect to know. Traditional approaches tended to regard the objective of archaeology mainly as reconstruction: piecing together the jigsaw. But today it is not enough simply to re-create the material culture of remote periods, or to complete the picture for more recent ones. A further objective has been termed "the reconstruction of the life ways of the people responsible for the archaeological remains". We are certainly interested in having a clear picture of how people lived, and how they exploited their environment. But we also seek to understand why they lived that way: why they had those patterns of behavior, and how their life ways and material culture came to take the form they did. We are interested, in short, in explaining change.

This paper tried to state that in the new world there are still archaeologists who are using old-fashioned methods, while they know their methods are useless. They know that their methods are not able to reconstruct the past. They are not responsible in their non-academic behaviors. The most important issue of "New Archaeology" is integration of Theory and Method. However, "there is disagreement over whether many concepts can be considered 'theoretical' or whether they are merely neutral techniques or methods outside the purview of theory. Stratigraphy, excavation and recording techniques, and the use of statistical methods are for example considered 'theoretical' by some, but 'just practical' or 'simply techniques' by others. Theory and method are often confused by archaeologists. In the strict sense, if theory covers the 'why' questions, method or methodology covers the 'how' questions. So theory covers why we selected this site to dig, method how we dig it. However, theory and method are obviously closely related, and many archaeologists regard such a straightforward division as too simple" (Johnson 1999, 2). As Johnson stated above, theory and method in archaeology are closely related to each other. But it is important to know 'how successful we have been in this regard!'

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VASTUTUSTUNDETUS ARHEOLOOGIAS

Resüme

Kõige tähtsamad küsimused arheoloogias algavad pigem sõnadega *kuidas* ja *miks* ning mitte sõnaga *mis*. 1960. aastatel hakati sellistele teaduslikele küsimustele vastamiseks rakendama uusi lähenemisviise ja meetodeid. Aga isegi veel tänapäeval, rohkem kui 40 aastat pärast “uue arheoloogia” ilmumist leidub arheolooge, kes üritavad vanaviisi alustada oma küsimusi sõnaga *mis*, kuigi nad teavad, et arheoloogias kasutatakse uusi meetodeid ja lähenemisviise. Käesoleva artikli eesmärgiks on iseloomustada ja arvustada vastutustundetust arheoloogias. On üldiselt teada, et “vanas arheoloogias” oli vastutustundetuse võimalus suurem kui “uues”. Artiklis on käsitletud vastutustundetuse probleemi ja kasutatud selle kujundit ahvatluse ning autoriteedi vahelise lõtku uurimiseks. On rõhutatud piiride ähmasust lugupeetud ja pseudoarheoloogide vahel.

Mõnede uuel metoodikal põhinevate uurimuste tulemused näitavad, et vanad lähenemisviisid on kasutatud. Vana metoodikat kasutavad arheoloogid on teadlikud sellest, et nende meetoditega pole võimalik minevikku rekonstrueerida, mistõttu nad ei vastuta oma mitteakadeemilise käitumise eest. On kirjutatud palju artikleid uute meetodite ja käsitusviiside kohta arheoloogias. Teiselt poolt on kõikide maade arheoloogid tuttavad erinevate käsitusviisidega, teades nende tugevusi ja nõrkusi.

Vanamoodsatel arheoloogidel on hõlbus korraldada oma andmeid mõistatusmängutaoliselt, kus õpitakse tundma minevikku, samas kui uute lähenemisviisidega arheoloogid õpivad avastama, kuidas minevikku rekonstrueerida. Käesolevas artiklis püüan ma väita, et traditsioonilised arheoloogid ei üritagi oma vana metoodikat muuta ja see ongi vastutustundetust arheoloogias.

Autori veendumuse kohaselt peaksid arheoloogid kulutama rohkem aega, mõistmaks sündmuse tähtsust ajas. Kuna arheoloogilise uurimistöö kõige tähtsamaks eesmärgiks on suurendada mineviku mõistmist, peaksid arheoloogid üritama vastata mitte ainult mis-, vaid eeskätt just miks- ja kuidas-küsimustele minevikusündmuste kohta. Kui meie eesmärk arheoloogias on inimkonna mineviku kohta rohkem teada saada, siis jääb põhiliseks küsimuseks, mida me eeldame teada saada. Traditsiooniliste lähenemisviiside kohaselt oli arheoloogia uurimisobjektiks mineviku rekonstrueerimine, s.o mosaiigi tükkhaaval kokkupanemine. Aga tänapäeval ei piisa enam sellest, et püüame taasluua pilti kaugete aegade materiaalsest kultuurist või täiendada lähemate ajaperioodide oma. Uueks eesmärgiks on nimetatud “nonde inimeste eluviiside rekonstrueerimist, kes on jätnud meile arheoloogilised jäänused”. Me oleme kindlasti huvitatud selgema ettekujutuse saamisest selle kohta, kuidas inimesed elasid ja kuidas nad oma keskkonda kasutasid. Aga me peame samuti üritama mõista, miks nad niimoodi elasid ja käitusid ning kuidas nende eluviisid ja materiaalne kultuur kujunesid just sellisteks, nagu nad kujunesid. Lühidalt: me oleme huvitatud muutuste selgitamisest.