Time, Tradition and Society in Greek Archaeology

Bridging the 'Great Divide'

Edited by
Nigel Spencer

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TIME, TRADITION AND SOCIETY IN GREEK ARCHAEOLOGY

THEORETICAL ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP (TAG)

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To Jan and Rachel

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General editor's preface

Why does Classical archaeology need theory? The purpose of the Theoretical Archaeology Group series is to answer the question by showing that archaeology contributes little to our understanding if it does not explore the theories that give meaning to the past. The last decade has seen some major developments in world archaeology and the *One World Archaeology* series provides a thematic showcase for the current scale of enquiry and variety of archaeological interests. The development of a theoretical archaeology series complements these thematic concerns and, by focusing attention on theory in all its many guises, points the way to future long-term developments in the subject.

In 1992 the annual Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) conference was held in Southampton. Europe and the world of archaeological theory was our theoretical theme at this EuroTAG conference. We stressed two elements in the structure of the three-day conference. In the first place 1992 had for long been heralded as the time when the single market would come into existence combined with moves towards greater European unity. While these orderly developments could be planned for and sessions organised around the role of archaeology and the past in the construction of European identity, no one could have predicted the horror of what would occur in former Yugoslavia. Throughout 1992 and beyond, the ideologies of integration and fragmentation, federalism and nationalism vied with each other to use the resources of the past in vastly different ways.

The second element recognised that 1992 was a notable anniversary for theoretical archaeology. Thirty years before, Lewis Binford had published his first seminal paper, 'Archaeology as Anthropology', in *American Antiquity*. This short paper was a theoretical beacon in an otherwise heavily factual archaeological world. From such beginnings came the influential processual movement which, in its early years, was referred to as the New Archaeology. Thirty years have clearly knocked the shine off such bright new futures. In the meantime archaeological theory had healthily fragmented while expanding into many areas of investigation, previously regarded as off-limits to archaeologists and their mute data. Processualism had been countered by post-processualism to either the enrichment or irritation of by now partisan theoretical

practitioners. EuroTAG marked the anniversary with a debate involving the views of Lewis Binford, Chris Tilley, John Barrett and Colin Renfrew, supplemented by opinions from the floor. Their brief was to outline the theoretical challenges now set before the subject. The audience heard various programmes of where we might go as well as fears about an uncertain theoretical future. Both optimism and pessimism for another thirty years of theoretical excitement were to be found in almost equal measure. However, the clear impression, exemplified by the number of people, almost eight hundred, who attended EuroTAG was that the strength of any future theoretical archaeology now lies in its diversity.

How different this was in numbers attending and diversity of viewpoints from the early days of TAG, an organisation whose aims have always been simple: to raise the profile of discussion about the theories of the past. The need for such a group was recognised at the first open meeting held in Sheffield in 1979 where the programme notes declared that 'British archaeologists have never possessed a forum for the discussion of theoretical issues. Conferences which address wider themes come and go but all too frequently the discussion of ideas is blanketed by the presentation of fact'. TAG set out to correct this balance and achieved it through an accent on discussion, a willingness to hear new ideas, often from people just beginning their theoretical careers.

EuroTAG presented some of the influences which must now contribute to the growth of theory in archaeology as the discipline assumes a central position in the dialogues of the humanities. As expected there was strong participation from European colleagues in sessions which focused on Iberia and Scandinavia as well as discussions of the regional traditions of theoretical and archaeological research in the continent, an archaeological perspective on theory in world archaeology, the identity of Europe and multicultural societies in European prehistory. Set beside these were sessions devoted to the theories of managing archaeology, visual information, food, evolutionary theory, architecture and structured deposition while historical archaeology argued for an escape from its subordination to history while classical archaeology embraced theory and applied it to its rich data. Finally, the current issues of value and management in archaeology were subjected to a critical examination from a theoretical perspective.

Nowhere was the polyphony of theoretical voices, issues and debates more clearly heard than in the session devoted to world perspectives on European archaeological theory. While EuroTAG was a moment to reflect on the European traditions and uses of theory, a comparative view was needed if such concerns were to avoid the call of parochialism. Here at the heart of EuroTAG was an opportunity to see the debate in action – not as the preserve of individuals, but as a dynamic answer to the question of why does the world need archaeological theory.

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The EuroTAG organising committee consisted of Clive Gamble, Sara Champion, Simon Keay and Tim Champion. They were helped by many staff and students from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton and particularly by Cressida Fforde and Olivia Forge who did the lion's share of the organization in the final days. Thanks were also due to Peter Philips who videotaped the debate and to Mike Corbishley, Peter Stone and Eric Maddern who organized videos and storytelling while the art of Carolyn Trant and Sylvia Hays provided the art exhibition. Financial support came from The Prehistoric Society, the TAG travel fund, Oxbow Books, Routledge and the University of Southampton.

Clive Gamble
July 1994

FOREWORD

The field of Classical archaeology holds a very special place within the wider discipline of archaeology in general. Its subject area is, of course, unique but that is a claim which could, in a sense, be made for the archaeology of every region and period of the world. But Ancient Rome and especially Ancient Greece naturally have a much greater claim upon our attention, for we are all the inheritors of that tradition which follows them, if only because we are all today inhabitants of that 'global village' created by modern communications and high technology which are themselves the beneficiaries of the scientific revolution that developed upon the heels of the Renaissance. We are the inheritors of the Classical world, whose study naturally holds a special significance for us, even if our cultural and genetic roots may not lie exclusively in Europe.

Classical archaeology, moreover, developed as a discipline long before prehistoric archaeology became a field for serious enquiry. Its preoccupations and concerns have, in a variety of subtle and often involuntary ways, shaped the preconceptions of archaeological research as a whole. Initially they were not regarded as separate fields at all. But as archaeology (and especially prehistoric archaeology) began to establish itself as an autonomous discipline from the middle of the nineteenth century, its relationship with Classical archaeology has been a rather special one. In general it is the field of archaeology *per se* which has been responsible for a whole series of technical advances, many of them based upon the applications of archaeological science. But Classical archaeology remains the paradigm case of text-aided archaeology – or, if that term seems too partial, of the study of the past in a context where the study of the written records and of the material remains must go hand in hand. In Europe, of course, the other such case is offered by the early Middle Ages (in Britain by the Anglo-Saxon period) where it is now a commonplace that much of our new knowledge comes from excavation and fieldwork, rather than from the re-interpretation of charters and documents taken in isolation. In reality the most difficult task is often that of bringing into meaningful relationship the data from the different categories of evidence.

For these reasons there has developed in recent years, and as the two areas have increasingly asserted their autonomy, something of a love–hate

relationship between archaeology and Classical archaeology. In his Introduction Nigel Spencer quotes several expressions of distaste by Classical archaeologists over recent developments in archaeological theory and practice, while comparable imprecations are not far to seek among prehistoric archaeologists railing against the technical inadequacies of Classical archaeologists at work in the field.

It is a notable circumstance that the session at the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) Conference held at Southampton from which the present volume springs was the first such, devoted exclusively to Classical archaeology, in the now quite long sequence of annual TAG meetings. That such a session should have taken so long to come about springs perhaps from the suspicions and tensions engendered by that love–hate relationship. It was clear to the Classical archaeologists that the archaeologists *per se,* and especially the prehistoric archaeologists, were an uncouth lot, who if not entirely illiterate were certainly incapable of interpreting a text with any knowledge or sensitivity. And it was clear to the prehistorians that the Classical archaeologists, totally and blindly committed to the doctrine of the primacy of the text over the material remains, would continue to ignore the hard information under their own noses – for instance the plant remains and animal bones which could easily be recovered from excavations at Classical sites – in favour of fleeting references to everyday life (in this case to food and drink) recorded in literary texts.

What I found refreshing about the Southampton session, and what now seems to me the particular merit of the present volume, is that it goes beyond these rather obvious lessons. It would have been perfectly possible to preach to the TAG converted by showing how modern archaeological techniques, for instance those of field survey, are now revolutionising certain fields of Classical archaeology and ancient history, notably in the area of settlement studies and demography. Instead we have a series of contributions which show very clearly how some of the insights potentially available from Classical archaeology can fruitfully be brought to bear much more widely, if the preconceptions upon which they rest are re-examined and made more explicit.

In recent years Ian Morris and James Whitley, following in the directions first indicated by Anthony Snodgrass, have been among those making new and coherent use both of the archaeological data, in a coherent and modern way, and of the traditions of Classical scholarship based ultimately upon the study of the texts. With the increasing focus of contemporary archaeology upon symbolic and cognitive topics – upon areas where the thought and imagination of the ancient actors has to be taken firmly into account – there are new tasks to be attempted, tasks which have in many cases been addressed by the Classical archaeologist, albeit in a rather intuitive way. Jonathan Hall's discussion of ethnicity is a good example of the new approach which draws upon the strengths

of both disciplines. The topic is one which prehistoric archaeologists have tended to steer clear of in recent years. The Classical archaeologists, on the other hand, have often found it difficult to shed the baggage of implicit assumptions brought forward from the last century. Such topics as this, or the way we interpret works of art which we believe were indeed intended by their makers to be seen as works of art, deserve the most searching theoretical treatment. Whether we share the somewhat cautious aspirations of a cognitive processual approach, or choose to follow the more free-and-easy initiatives of the post-processual archaeologists (to adopt for a moment the terminologies currently in use among 'theoretical' archaeologists) there is work to be done here which is of wide general relevance for archaeology as a whole.

For these reasons this is, I believe, an important book and one which will establish the path for many future studies.

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Sincere thanks are also due to Clive Gamble at Southampton University for helping to organise the publication of the session at TAG from which this volume comes and for liaising with the publishers throughout the period of the book's preparation.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

It is impossible to devise one consistent system for the transliteration of ancient Greek, modern Greek and Turkish words. The contributors, therefore, have all employed their own versions of the most conventional systems. Authors of ancient texts have been written out in full with the titles of their works either simply transliterated or given in the Latin/English form regularly employed.