

FOREWORD AND AFTERTHOUGHT

by

Talia SHAY and Jean CLOTES

A volume whose title proclaims the limitations of the discipline of archaeology naturally challenges the reader to examine such a view. The purpose of this paper is to justify the title of this book by making explicit what some of the limitations of archaeology are, and how in view of these limitations archaeology should continue to acquire its knowledge.

G.B. Collingwood, a philosopher and archaeologist, argued in his 1926 lecture on the problem of historical consciousness that "the only possible object of knowledge is something that is real now. Of the past as a past ... we can have only conjecture, better or worse grounded" (Collingwood 1975 : 568). Over the years, a number of other archaeologists have also recognized the past as a temporal realm distinct from the present (Piggot 1950; 1965 : Daniel 1962); and it was Binford (1938 : 18-20) who asserted that "the observations we make about archaeology are here and now, contemporary with ourselves". The very same idea is expressed by Lowenthal (1985) in his poetic book *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Drawing on all the arts, humanities and social sciences, the author examines the ever-changing role of the past in shaping our lives, as well as the continuous reshaping of the legacy of the past by each generation in line with current needs. Every act of recognition or protection of a relic, Lowenthal suggests, affects its form and our impressions (Lowenthal 1985 : 263).

To recognize that historical knowledge is invariably changeable may seem self-evident for some of us today. It is also consistent with recent studies in other sciences that consider the non-epistemological influences that shape the processes and products of research (Kühn 1962; Feyerabend 1975; Jackson and Willmott 1987). As a result of this atmosphere scholars have come to consider themselves as part of the cultural tradition that they wish to interpret, and call for criticism of the presuppositions underlying their theories and moral norms (Hesse 1988 : 332).

The philosophical notion that truth is relativistic has been carried over to archaeology. Western archaeology is now concerned not only with a search for facts but also with the examination of the non-epistemological effects on its theories and practice. Trigger (1984, 1986), for instance, relates traditional archaeology to nationalistic or colonial interests. Nationalistic interests, Trigger asserts, tend to focus on the predominant culture rather than on smaller communities; and to concentrate attention on periods when the major culture was in power. In regard to national archaeology a recent review by Litvak King (1985) of the archaeology in Mesoamerica presents it as provincial and chauvinistic (see also Shay 1989). Colonialistic

orientations, on the other hand, are associated by Trigger with the diffusional view of traditional archaeology, by which cultural changes are explained in order to denigrate native societies under colonial rule which are regarded to lack initiative to develop on their own culture (Trigger 1984 : 363). According to Trigger, the background assumptions of the new archaeology are different from, and are related to, imperialistic interests. New Archaeology emphasizes universalism and denies the validity of studying national traditions that stand in the way of American economic and political activity.

Background assumptions are related today not only to theories but also to archaeological practice. For instance Tilley (1989 : 279) associates excavations primarily with the socio-political interests of the present; on the other hand Leone (1981 : 5) asserts that the display of archaeological materials in museums turns them into a piece of modern material culture, to be analyzed for what it tells of the culture that created it, but not about the past *per se*. Not everyone accepts Leone's attitude, and the liberties taken by modern museology in interpreting and presenting the past are denounced by Bronowski (*Ha'aretz* 14.9.90) as being a deception which leaves nothing of the magic and authenticity of the past. The deception to which Bronowski refers is that of Lascaux II, a copy of the "Sistine Chapel" of French prehistory executed by modern artists for the presentation of the 17,000 year-old paintings found in the cave.

The moral implications of the archaeological activity are also being discussed at length today primarily by examining the conflict between traditional archaeological values that dictate its responsibility to acquire knowledge and other value systems in the modern world (Green 1984; see also Bahn, Siegel and Shay in this volume).

As we might expect, scientific language betokens the emergence of these new trends, since those scientists who deliberately insert traces of the present into their research also use less formal language as well. Thus, while in the 1950s Daniel, in his book *A Hundred Years of Archaeology* (Daniel 1950 : 10) apologized for presenting to his readers what seemed to him important rather than a catalogue of discoveries, the archaeological language of the 1980s is denounced by Hodder (1989 : 271) for being impersonal and objective as though its descriptions were self-evident.

The awareness that the past is ever changing is only recent. Many archaeologists still believe that their knowledge of the past cannot be acquired by way of a historical and cultural plurality of endeavors, but that it is rather a unitary (i.e. non-pluralistic) and technical product which derives its authority from adherence to an impersonal method. As an example in kind of this approach, which in other sciences is termed absolutist (Jackson and Willmott 1987 : 364), we should like to cite a recent popular article by Ben Dov (*Ha'aretz* 16.11.90), who rejects the criticism of being politically biased in his discoveries at the Temple Mount, by arguing that his excavation was founded on the conviction that an archaeologist can present objective facts relating to earlier periods regardless of the political issues of the day.

As this approach to knowledge of the past is also founded on the conviction that bias can be eliminated by the application of proper scientific method, it allows for only limited self-reflection. One might mention in this regard the puzzling silence of Israeli archaeologists, who adhere to material facts but have thus far ignored the values which underlie their theory and practice, as well as the ethical implications of both (Shay 1989).

The absolutist approach to historical knowledge almost universally espouses analogy as an appropriate procedure for making inferences about the past. "Archaeology as a whole is analogy" says Chang (1967 : 109), "for to claim any knowledge other than the objects themselves is to assume knowledge of patterns in culture and history and to apply these patterns to the facts". Contextual archaeology of the 1980s also depends on analogy for its interpretation of the past. Hodder, for instance, asserts that "the meaning of objects is derived from the totality of its similarities and differences, associations and contrasts... cultural meanings (within the systematic approach of new archaeology) are imposed... from the outside" (Hodder 1986 : 25, 138; also see Hesse below). Accordingly, inferences concerning the past take place by analogy with similarities and differences between particular cases, and not by law-like explanations which may affect the objectivity of the research.

Science, too, rests essentially on analogical inference from the concrete, says Hesse (see below). But in contrast to the humanities, science goes beyond analogy and seeks law-like relations in its pursuit of the scientific "objectivity" (see also Hesse 1988 : 331). The use of analogical inference by archaeologists has been questioned by Binford (1972 : 14-21) and Gould (Gould and Watson 1982 : 372) who pointed out the difficulties of validating such inference and of producing an interpretative principle from the particular data upon which analogy is founded.

In our view the application of analogy by traditional archaeology may be associated with the conviction that the physical phenomena of the universe have inherent and immutable features (Fitting 1973 : 288) whose similarities and differences are self-evident to the observer who can thus compare them in order to make inferences concerning the past. As for the use of analogical procedure by contextual archaeology, it was pointed out by Binford (1986 : 401-402) that there is a paradox in the adherents of this approach appealing to cultural relativism (Shank and Tilley 1987 : 2).

In assessing the two archaeological approaches toward knowledge of the past, it is questionable whether the epistemological assumptions underlying traditional archaeology can be reconciled, as was recently hoped (Trigger 1986 : 1), with the conflicting assumptions that non-epistemological influences shape the processes and product of research. One would rather think that there is only very limited dialogue possible between those who are convinced that they can uncover and preserve the past as it was and those who believe that the past is continuously altered.

Although traditional archaeology is hardly concerned with self-reflection, it has nevertheless given thoughts to the limitations on our knowledge of the past. These limitations have been attributed to the incomplete state of the archaeological record, as well as to the assumption that material remains have in the course of time lost those non-material features which pertain to the sociocultural system under study (Binford 1972 : 21).

In the late 1960s, Binford took issue with this view of the matter and argued that the limits of inference about the past from the archaeological record are not set by the nature of the record, but depend on our theoretical assumptions and our methodological ingenuity (Binford 1972 : 22-23; Shenan 1989 : 832). However Binford's approach has been criticized lately as being partial, and ignoring the complexity and creativity of cultural systems (Hodder 1982 : 4, 5; Trigger 1986 : 11; Shenan 1989 : 832).

Traditional efforts to construct and evaluate knowledge of the past in relation to the purely epistemological, timeless conception of scientific method are today seen as being illusory. The new criteria offered by new archaeology (Binford 1972 : 17) for the accuracy of our knowledge of the past are also linked to a certain extent to the absolutist conception of knowledge (Trigger 1986 : 2).

In contrast to the approaches set out above, the self-reflection of today's archaeology on the limitations of the discipline derives principally from the conviction that past and present are not exclusive, and that our knowledge of earlier times is contemporary with ourselves and is thus changeable.

These changes of paradigms in archaeology involving a new definition of scientific truth conflict with the traditional absolutist concept of perfect knowledge, but are congruent with the recent relativistic approach toward knowledge of the past. According to the latter, scientific progress results from the concentration of each generation on different goals and its defining anew of the limitations of the discipline (Kühn 1970; see also Shenan 1989 : 832).

In this regard we would disagree with our friend Bernard Siegel (see his article below), who claims that the new archaeology has a short history. New archaeology is criticized today in the light of recent tendencies which have emerged in the discipline (Trigger 1986 : 10-11). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it has enormously widened and altered the range of factors considered to be relevant to comprehending the variability in the archaeological record to date. As a consequence today's archaeology is no longer bound by the limitations set by traditional archaeology – a case in point being contextual archaeology which emphasizes the role of ideas and beliefs (Hodder 1982 : 11, 12; Trigger 1986 : 5).

Recognizing that our knowledge of the past has been altered continuously, we confront the question of value. Thus if no objective facts of the past can be found by archaeologists, what then should the value and goals of our discipline be ?

Yet to see why and how scientific knowledge of the past is changed helps free us from past notions of perfect knowledge that are no longer relevant to the modern scientific quest, and to accept that any historical knowledge which we may find is no more final than that previously found. In replacing the traditional search for absolute historical truth with the pursuit of tentative truth, the relativist approach encourages a continuous re-examination of historical knowledge as well as an openness to assessing different claims and strategies of research in archaeology.

Most archaeologists would agree that archaeology should be related to other sciences (Steward and Seizer 1938 : 5-7; Trigger 1986 : 6; Meyers 1984). Moreover, in a symposium on related subjects (see below), Funkenstein has suggested that unless vital relationships are maintained with other disciplines, a discipline could no longer be regarded as scientific. It is our view that archaeology should favorably consider replacing its absolutist standpoint with a more relativistic approach; otherwise it may be excluded from the debate taking place in other sciences (Jackson and Willmott 1987 : 361).

In broad outline, our argument is that since the attempts to discover perfect historical knowledge and to purge archaeology of its non-epistemological influences have proven to be

illusory, archaeology should direct its concerns toward the development of a theoretical framework of pluralistic approaches for the comprehension of human behavior in the past. The traditional claim, therefore, for the study of "archaeology as archaeology" and Binford's argument in behalf of considering "archaeology as anthropology" should now be extended to embrace as well the notions of "archaeology as religion" and "archaeology as art and aesthetics" and so forth. Such pluralistic efforts to adopt the viewpoint of various disciplines would doubtless broaden the spectrum of our knowledge of the complexity of human activity in the past.

Our conviction regarding this kind of archaeology has resulted in Talia Shay's efforts to organize a symposium entitled "The Objectivity/Subjectivity of Science" for the annual meeting of the Israeli Anthropological Association in Tel Aviv University in 1989. Some of the articles appearing in our volume were discussed for the first time during the 1989 meeting. This symposium represented a counterbalance to the official position of Israeli archaeology which has no interest at present in studying the sources and limitations of its knowledge, and rather prefers to adhere to Biblical and traditional studies of the region's past (Shay 1989).

Although this introduction has outlined some avenues of explorations in archaeology, it would be incorrect to consider this volume as representing a single viewpoint.

The papers collected in this book were written by a variety of authors from different parts of the world : Africa (Ghana, North Africa), Europe (England, Belgium, France, Spain), the Middle East (Israel), North America. They illustrate the plurality of approaches to archaeology that we find so necessary and they can be arranged under two main labels :

1. *Those dealing with politics and ethics :*

Gonzalez Morales gives a first-hand account of the wide-ranging influence that local authorities have been exercising over research in Cantabria since the political system in Spain changed from a centralised government to local "autonomias".

Braun acknowledges the strong bias existing in Israel in favour of Biblical Archaeology and its detrimental effect upon the study of non-Biblical periods. However he argues that it is mitigated by the consequences of a policy of salvage archaeology, presumed to be more objective.

About the same country, Syon gallantly presents "the other side", that of a nationalist archaeologist, whose position rests mainly on the facts that on the one hand it is doubtful whether "anybody can escape from his ideologies in any of the roles he plays in life", and on the other hand that "no evidence is deliberately withheld or distorted."

Agorsah's is a case study of archaeological research in Ghana, where he shows how preconceived notions, in particular diffusionism under the influence of Eurocentric ideas, for some decades obfuscated reality.

Shay describes the conflicting positions in Israel of the religious circles that believe in the sacredness of the dead, and, on the other hand, of the archaeologists who, contrary to some

modern Western tendencies (see Bahn below), adhere to the traditional idea of the capital importance of Science, rising above personal and religious feelings.

Bahn admits as self-evident the limitations of archaeological knowledge and addresses the problem of excavating the human remains of foreign native societies and of what to do with them; i.e. he is ready to accept some more limitations because of the ethical issues involved.

A well-known anthropologist, Siegel, analyses the different kinds of constraints put on archaeology, whether they be politically motivated or result from theories and paradigms. In view of those constraints Siegel tries to foresee the future of archaeology.

2. Theories, methods and their biases :

Hesse remarks that archaeology is beset by two main problems : – theory must be about unobservable events; – a dichotomy exists between a scientific rationalisation of archaeological thought and the symbolic way of thinking of traditional societies with which archaeology deals. In order to overcome these obstacles, archaeologists should make speculative hypotheses on the basis of analogies with comparable systems. This method is not in conflict with other scientific methods as it only emphasizes the local and the concrete and makes no demands upon the universality of law-like relations and theories.

Three other papers deal with Palaeolithic art in Europe.

Lorblanchet, as an example of some unconscious a-prioris that shape and warp research, writes about the triumph (which he deplors and condemns) of naturalism in art studies.

Ucko emphasizes the intimate relationship between the investigator's own preconceptions and the research methodology adopted in the study of Palaeolithic art.

Marshack challenges the so-called "objective" categories and methods so useful to and so favoured by researchers. He thinks that we should recognize the subjectivity of the "maker", i.e. analyse the "processes involved in the creation" of symbols and their different "levels of cultural and individual relevance" rather than the material end products. In so doing he too points to the inherent subjectivity of interpretations.

Camps' paper exposes the limitations of our documentation when it stems from one single archaeological source, as is so often the case. This can be proved when different documentary sources exist, each with its own limitations, but which can then be checked against each other, as is the case with the Neolithic and protohistoric fauna in North Africa.

Clottes deals with "fashions" in Archaeology, which entail an unreasoned rejection or adoption of methods and/or concepts and set up a distorting prism between archaeologists and their work, all the more dangerous as it is mostly unperceived.

Otte and Keeley denounce the excesses of post-diffusionism in Palaeolithic European studies and the present-day tendency to a jingoistic attitude which prevents researchers from perceiving the full scope of cultural and social archaeological problems.

Finally, Heimann tells the romantic and strangely beautiful tale of a contemporary archaeologist whose love for the desert and his home land drove to a sort of wild and mystic quest, to a borderline form of archaeology.¹

This book thus includes many different opinions and examples concerning the development and practice of archaeology. Notwithstanding this divergence of views, and maybe because of it, there is a common thread through it all, which is the search to the question we put at the beginning – to wit : what and where are the limitations on our archaeological knowledge ?²

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BINFORD, L.R.

1972. *New Perspectives in Archaeology*, edited by S.R. and L.R. Binford, pp. 1-32. Aldine, Chicago.

1983. *In Pursuit of the Past*. Thames and Hudson, London.

1986. Data, Relativism and Archaeological Science. *Man* 22 : 391-404.

CHANG, K.L. 1967. *Rethinking Archaeology*. Random House, New York.

COLLINGWOOD, G.B. 1975. Some Perplexities about Time. In *The Human Experience of Time*, edited by C.M. Sherover, pp. 558-571. New York University Press, New York

DANIEL, G.E.

1950. *A Hundred Years of Archaeology*. Duckworth, London.

1962. *The Idea of Prehistory*. Penguin, Harmondsworth.

FEYERABEND, P. 1975. *Against Method*. New Left Book, London.

FITTING, J.E. 1973. Plumbing, Philosophy and Poetry. In *The Development of North American Archaeology*, edited by J.E. Fitting, pp. 287-291. Anchor Press, New York.

GOULD, R.A., and P.J. WATSON. 1982. A Dialogue on the Meaning and Use of Analogy in Ethnoarchaeological Reasoning. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1 : 355-358.

GREEN, E.L. (ed). 1984. *Ethics and Values in Archaeology*. Free Press, New York.

HESSE, M. 1988. "Rationality" in Science and Morals. *Zygon* 23 (3) : 327-332.

¹ Pr. S. Heimann's paper calls for a special comment. I met her a few years ago in the faculty club of Haifa University. As we were the only people in the restaurant, we talked and she told me that she was writing, at the moment, about her experience in the desert, where she had participated in an archaeological survey. While listening to her I could not help thinking of the "Visit to the Master", the final chapter of Flannery's book "Guila Marquits" (1986), which goes into the origins of agriculture in Meso-America. Flannery put to the Master, who is a kind of "Holy Man from the Orient", different questions regarding his explanations of early agriculture. "A Portrait of an Archaeologist", by S. Heimann, similarly inquires into the boundaries between archaeology and reality. It thus provides a fitting ending to this book (T. Shay).

² The work of Talia Shay was supported by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

HODDER, I.

1982. Theoretical Archaeology : A Reactionary View. In *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, edited by I. Hodder, pp. 1-16. Cambridge University Press, London.

1986. *Reading the Past*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

1989. Writing Archaeology : Site Reports in Context : *Antiquity* 63 : 268-274.

JACKSON, N., and H. WILLMOTT. 1987. Beyond Epistemology and Reflective Conversation : Toward Human Relations. *Human Relations* 40 (6) : 361-380.

KUHN, T. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

LEONE, M.P. 1981. Archaeology's Relationship to the Present and the Past. In *Modern Material Culture : The Archaeology of Us*, edited by R.A. Gould and M.B. Schiffer, pp. 5-14. Academic Press, New York.

LITVAK KING, J. 1985. Mesoamerica : Events and Processes, in the last Fifty years. *American Antiquity* 50 (2) : 374-382.

LOWENTHAL, D. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

MEYERS, E.M. 1987. Judaic Studies and Archaeology, the Legacy of Avi-Yona. *Eretz Israel* 19 : 21*-27*.

PIGGOT, S.

1950. *William Stukeley : An Eighteenth Century Antiquary*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

1965. *Ancient Europe*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

SHANK, M. and C. TILLEY. 1987. *Reconstructing Archaeology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

SHAY, T. 1989. Israeli Archaeology – Ideology and Practice – *Antiquity* 63 (241) : 768-772.

SHENAN, S. 1989. Archaeology as Archaeology or as Anthropology ? Clark's analytical Archaeology and the Binford's New Perspectives in Archaeology 21 years on. *Antiquity* 63 : 831-835.

STEWART, J.H., and F.M. SELZER. 1938. Function and Configuration in Archaeology. *American Antiquity* 4 (1) : 4-10.

TILLEY, C. 1989. Excavation as Theater. *Antiquity* 63 : 275-280.

TRIGGER, B.G.

1984. Alternative Archaeologies : Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist. *Man* 91 : 355-370.

1986. Prospects for World Archaeology. *World Archaeology* 18 (1) : 1-20.