



NEW ZEALAND  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND



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BOOK REVIEW

Hodder, I. (Editor) 1987. Archaeology As Long-Term History. London, Cambridge University Press. Price: £UK 25.00, \$NZ 100.00-125.00 (estimated).

This slender work (145pp) continues Ian Hodder's series of volumes on the theorisation of archaeology around themes drawn from symbolic and structuralist anthropology. It consists of eleven chapters which are organised under four headings: the historical approach in archaeology, continuity and change in the very long term, the past active in the present, and, finally, acculturation, diffusion and migration as social symbolic processes.

Hodder's chapter (1) is entitled the contribution of the long term. It contends that the "archaeo-historian" should seek recurring patterns of association, and contrast, similarity, and difference. However, Hodder's more controversial argument is that this seeking after patterning will enable long term structures to be identified and cultural sense to be made of the individual items and events which are represented archaeologically. Fortunately, the remainder of the book exonerates this proposition.

Whitley's chapter (2) is an empathetic exposition of the idealist tradition in German archaeology and art history. His argument is that Anglo-American archaeology, which is, by contrast, excessively preoccupied with function and context, would benefit from some incorporation of the German intellectual approach.

Helskog (Chapter 3) recognises continuity between the symbolic content of rock carving in Artic Norway over 3500 years and contemporary Sami drums. He argues that these long term continuities can inform and improve upon current reconstructions of the formation of contemporary European society.

Von Gernet and Timmins' chapter (4) is one of the most stimulating essays in this book. The authors identify a "basic substratum or commonality of ideas" between the ethnographic and the archaeological in the case of the Iroquian archaeology in Ontario. Three of the points they make are quoted here:

"The ancient substratum of beliefs resurfaces in different forms at different times, without necessarily involving contacts between the occurrences" (Abstract, p31).

"Some symbolic associations crosscut archaeologically delimited 'cultural' boundaries and may reach levels of generality beyond specific spatio-temporal contexts" (p. 41).

and, "The problem of unique context is not as difficult to overcome once we begin to understand the link between general principles of meaning and symbolism and specific cultural arrangements" (p. 42).

These ideas recall Skinner's valiant struggle with the serpent motif in Oceanic art, as well as a number of contemporary issues in Pacific archaeology.

Nowakowski (Chapter 5) has studied the reuse of traditional farm buildings on Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, England. She argues that the highly variable behaviour of contemporary individuals in relation to their 'historical' material basis reflects community and cultural stresses which follow from aspects of modernisation.

Lane (Chapter 6) returns to Collingwood, as we all should, to reiterate the belief that the thoughts behind excavated objects are the stuff of historical explanation. He uses as his example Dogon village organisation of West Africa. Lane's essay shows brilliantly how spatial and physical ordering of objects and actions are linked to socio-cultural beliefs concerned with order and reproduction.

Vestergaard (Chapter 7) follows a Triggerian line with her contention that "the past is constantly reconstructed to produce meaning for a changing present". She goes on to demonstrate the truth and importance of that point with reference to the Scandanavian Volsunga cycle and the German Nibelungenlied.

Pratap (Chapter 8) follows a particularistic line in describing shifting cultivators of the Rajmahal Hills. He insists that this description must be set within a context of contemporary and historic economic, cultural and political interrelationships. This is a timely leavening of the heavy symbolic load offered in previous chapters wherein the thrust of analysis has been in the direction of understanding symbolism within and because of specific historic-cultural traditions where they are conceptualised as isolated entities. Pratap's essay is the longest and most successful chapter in this volume.

Moore (Chapter 9) discusses the "modernisation in traditional societies" and the changing organisation of symbolic space which followed from or accompanied that process. She establishes and emphasises "continuity through change" in the acculturation of the Marakwet in Kenya. The empirical emphasis is on the changing organisation of social space. New Zealand archaeologists reading this chapter will recognise the potential value of a comparable study here, now that the symbolic organisation of precontact Maori dwelling and

kainga have been reconstructed.

Collett (Chapter 10) examines "the material culture effects of migrations of Ngoni and Sotho (Kololo) groups into South Central Africa." He shows that migration is indeed not readily identified in material culture in this particular case, unless one adopts an inductive and symbolist mode of analysis.

Finally, Greene's ambitious (Chapter 11) study of Gothic material culture shows that general correlations exist between forms of Ostrogothic and Visigothic eagle-brooches and major political-military events of the period c350-500 A.D. There is insufficient attention paid to the necessary elimination of alternative explanations. Correlation does not constitute explanation.

This volume, like others Hodder has presented, is a celebration of Collingwood. Two themes run through the work. These are 1. the notion that continuity in cultural structures occurs within and despite major social changes; and 2. the realisation that economic and other domains can and do have significant impact upon cultural structures. These themes may appear to be opposed. They are not. What the volume fashions out of a disparate group of case studies is the belief that archaeological analyses, informed by a theory of culture and a structural-functional epistemology, are essential to the unravelling of that fundamental interaction. Archaeology is shown to be at once historical and anthropological - gone are tawdry biological analogy, most traces of practical reason and evolutionism.

All else said we can safely conclude that certain British archaeologists, led by Ian Hodder, have resurrected Collingwood and discovered symbolism, structuralism and the cultural ordering of space, form and action. All of this is extremely laudable. However, it is to be understood that archaeologists in several contexts outside Britain have been working along these lines for a substantial period of time. Hodder's book strengthens the enterprise, adds a novel (somewhat awkward) terminological twist to it (Chapter 1) and diversifies the range of case studies which are now available. This is a captivating and provocative volume. It is also seriously overpriced.

I congratulate Hodder and his colleagues on their contribution.

Doug Sutton