

The Post Hole

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Relating to the Dead



The view from the trenches A QUERY FOR KEVIN
Tips to help you survive out there this summer
An interview with Angela Clark
A quick chat with the busy bioarchaeologist

The Post Hole

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The Post Hole is a student run journal for all those interested in archaeology. It aims to promote discussion and the flow of ideas in the department of Archaeology for the University of York and the wider archaeological community. If you would like to get involved with the editorial process, writing articles or photography then please get in touch via email – (<mailto:editor@theposthole.org>).

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1 A View From the Trenches | 2 |
| 2 The Archaeology of Synaesthesia | 7 |
| 3 Relating To The Dead: Incorporating Archaeological Sites Into Our Personal Identity | 11 |
| 4 Adventures In Processual Theory | 13 |
| 5 Anti-postprocessualism: a new hope | 17 |
| 6 A reply to Preece: The Second Time Around | 20 |
| 7 An Interview With Angela Clark | 23 |

1 A View From the Trenches

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With the spring term at York University now more than half completed, the thoughts of first years may well be turning towards excavation in the summer term. So now might be a good time to share some thoughts and memories of the university excavations of 2010.

Weather With You

The first thing to note is that the Great British weather is likely to be the greatest enemy any of you could face in the weeks on site. May Day bank holiday 2010 saw sun, wind and hail (the latter on four occasions during the morning) all available at Heslington East. So forget Nazis, Soviet spies and rival archaeologists, instead be prepared for anything the forecasters cannot forecast. There was a good reason Indiana Jones never dug in Britain!

2010 will not live long in the memory for its long hot summer, as it did not really have one. But it was just long enough to last through most of the excavation period. Long hot days do not just make for uncomfortable working conditions, they also make the ground iron hard: therefore digging is that much more difficult. Some of the most precious items you could find on site are that of sunscreen and bottled water.

But when the rain did finally arrive last summer, it arrived in style! The final two days were wet and muddy, though we battled on and excavation continued anyway. Do not expect that three raindrops allows you to pack up and head for home, because it will not happen. . .

Be Prepared!

Remember the old scouting motto and you will not go far wrong. Some trowels are provided, but having your own would be a definite advantage, though it is advisable to find some way of marking it so you know it is yours, should it get mixed up with a few others.

You will all get briefed on clothing and what to bring and what not, but I would suggest a couple of extra pieces for the trainee archaeologists kit. Fingerless gloves, of the type used by cyclists, are a definite boon. You will be working for weeks with your hands and the gel pads in the palms will cushion the impact of mattock and trowel day in and day out. And as you will be doing a lot of that work on your knees, a good pair of strap-on knee pads will also be useful.

Something else to consider. . . a camera. You will most likely need something to illustrate your field journals, and a camera is also good as a memory aid. Now, where did I leave mine?



Figure 1 – Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, its plastic field drain! (Photo credit: Author)

The Grass Is Always Greener...

Only one person on any archaeological dig can ever find Excalibur, or the entrance to Atlantis, so when you have been scratching around for two days and all you have found is a Victorian clay pipe stem and half a house brick, you will likely be a bit envious of all the pottery and coins coming out of the next trench. But do not despair, because whatever you find, it is all archaeology. Yes, even the 'post-Roman' plastic field drain cutting through the Roman ditch I was working on last summer! Days were spent excavating this mysterious feature that cut across the Roman ditch, until the truth was finally revealed. But it is all part of the rich pattern of archaeology and the field drain got tidied up and recorded with the same care as if it had been a Roman feature.

Even though Area A (the 40 by 40 metre section where I was working) was quite devoid of 'stuff', it still produced a handful of good finds, including a double Roman pot discovered in a ditch terminus. This find was one pot, with another larger pot placed upside down over it, and could have contained a cremation, though the ashes would have washed away long ago. Not exactly the Ark of the Covenant, but a very nice find.



Figure 2 – Part of the Roman double pot find. (Photo credit: Author)

Taking One For The Team

Teamwork. Probably the single most important part of the learning curve of the excavation term. Archaeology is a big department at York, with almost a 100 people in their second year and up to a 120 in first year. I am now halfway through my degree course and I still do not know about a third of the people in my year. So having been assigned to a team of people, some of whom you have only passed in the refectory or the courtyard, is a chance to make new and lasting friendships that you might not otherwise do.

You will find you have more in common with some of your new teammates than you ever thought possible. Bonds will be forged through adversity and triumph, through sun and rain, through lunchtime and afternoon break. You may also discover new skills, not just in your new friends, but also in yourself.

A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Dig...

Whatever happens out in the field, do not forget to have a laugh about it! Whether it is during the break, walking off site at the end of the day, in the pub afterwards or on Facebook, humour is the best antidote to a day of aches, pains and soggy boots. Find one thing funny and the day will not seem quite so bad.



Figure 3 – Ever wondered where baby wheelbarrows come from? (Photo credit: Author)

However you get your laughs, be it getting your mates to do funny poses for the camera, a colleagues' amusing item of clothing, recreating moments of history using pistachio shells or giving your features interesting names, funny incidents make any day better and pass quicker. It is a proven scientific fact, honest!

The Joys of Ex

Of course, once the digging is done, the last find has been bagged, the final mattock stowed away until summer 2012, the post-ex session arrives. This gives the archaeology students a chance to do some more detailed analysis on the finds so carefully removed from their soily prison just a short time before.

For the 2009/10 intake, this took on four basic formats: sample processing (including sieving dry soil samples and 'floating' wet ones), finds washing (the pottery, glass and bone, but not metal or wood), excavation records (putting together a plan of the site) and preparing for the end of term exhibition.



Figure 4 – Fish bones. More interesting than they look, I promise! (Photo credit: Author)

This is a chance to be reunited with your best find of the dig, the section/plan drawing you did out in the field, or to learn more about the scientific processes used by archaeologists. Plus this is a great time to catch up with your newfound mates from the excavation, sitting around in the sunshine and handling the find, to reflect on the academic year gone by and look forward to the summer holidays.

I will leave you with one final piece of advice: Have fun out there!

2 The Archaeology of Synaesthesia

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I should probably start off this article by telling you exactly what synaesthesia is, because the rest of the article will not make much sense without knowing a bit about the condition. Besides which, I am guessing a good proportion of the people reading this will not have the foggiest clue what it is; without wishing to patronise my readership of course, but then I did not know what it was for years, and I have the blinking thing!

Synaesthesia is a condition whereby the senses are mixed up. This completely alters one's perception of the world. It can work in a variety of different ways; some people can taste shapes, others see colours when they experience different emotions, some, like myself, can perceive colours, smells and tastes when they hear different sounds. This can be a tricky concept to get your head around. As a child I remember a number of parents/guardians/teachers/total strangers having absolutely no idea what I was on about when I said I could feel fluffy pink clouds when I heard the number two, for my part I just assumed that everyone experienced numbers in the same way I did. It was not until several years later when I read a book on the subject that I realised I was in a minority, and that not even people with the condition perceive the world in the same way as others with it. It is not known quite how many people have the condition; there are theories that all babies are born with it, but lose it within the first few years of their lives, whilst LSD has been known to induce a brief state of synaesthesia. One of the more unusual aspects of it is that people with more extreme forms of the condition have parts of their brain which are completely smooth. Although to be honest if I am in a state to see parts of my brain, I have probably got more to worry about than how bumpy it is. . .

But how does this fit into archaeology? Unsurprisingly there are a variety of different theories and methods regarding the use of the senses in archaeology. It was a long held belief, for example, that the ancient Greeks had not developed the ability to see the full spectrum of colours by the advent of the Greek language, around 8th Century BC . This was because their writings describe only four colours: bronze, yellow/green, purple/red and light/dark. Homer describes the sky as being bronze and sheep as purple (Triulzi 2006). However, this does not necessarily mean that they actually saw the world in those colours, but rather that their perception of them was different to our own. Bronze was a shining colour that could be applied to the sky as much as swords, while a yellow/green colour was applied to honey and to birds because it was a colour of life. Furthermore, it may have been that they were restrained linguistically, and did not have the right words to describe all that they saw, thus making groupings based on more simple colours (Triulzi 2006).

This raises an interesting point, historians were quick to jump to the conclusion that their ocular ability was less developed than our own, rather than exploring different avenues of sensual perception. Vision is generally held as the most important of our senses, but then would you really be happy to lose any of your others? Our five senses together make up what we 'see' in the world, and it may be that the ancient Greeks placed a higher emphasis on the way they felt about an object, rather than what they just saw.

Archaeology by its very nature lends itself to a very sensualist approach. Not only are we engaging with artefacts through the medium of touch and sight, smell, taste and sound can all be employed. The former two lend themselves very well to the identification of substances; my lab tutor was surprised but rather pleased when I started sniffing a selection of metals I was asked to identify, but did advise me not to taste them as one contained arsenic and I might die. Sound is another important, and often overlooked, factor in archaeology. Stone Henge, for example, has been recognised as having certain audial properties, although whether or not this was instrumental in its construction has yet to be seen (Till 2009). It has been theorised, however, that the ring of stone would make a sound similar to that of a wine glass when its rim is rubbed by a wet finger. Computer models of the monument compare its acoustic qualities to that of a concert venue (Till 2009). Here we can see how looking beyond the boundaries of touch and sight can yield different results.

In history too we can see the usage of a multitude of senses within interpretation. Christian culture is very concerned with our own sensualism, as God decrees we need only have faith and not proof in his existence; this is seen clearly when Thomas is rebuked for needing to touch Jesus rather than just accepting his reappearance. Sensualist thinkers, however, deemed all senses important in gaining an understanding of the world we live in. Only by direct sensory experiences can we uncover the truth. Advocates of this approach, such as philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, believed that less emphasis should be placed on sight, as it is the most easily deceived and can be unreliable. Instead the sense of touch should be paramount in our exploration of the physical world (Linsay 2000).

Vision is now increasingly being recognised as perhaps the least important of our senses. Consider the development of our senses. Vision did not come first; in evolutionary terms smell came before sight, in human development we can utilise our other four senses while still womb-bound. As a logo-centric culture we often place our importance on sight alongside our need for writing, but they do not even require each other to exist. From the point of view of a synesthete, all senses are equally important as they occupy the same place in ourselves. From an archaeological point of view this can serve as a reminder not to simply analyze artefacts with our eyes, but to experience them with all our senses (Hirst. 2009). Ancient texts are not just words, but also physical objects of wax, papyrus, paper or stone that can be experienced audibly as well as visually. In other words, vision should take its place alongside the other senses, rather than being master to them, as only through the utilization of all our senses can we truly detect meanings within objects .

Synesthetes, however, are able to employ their senses in ways beyond that of the regular archaeologist. This makes for a different and interesting perspective, especially when tackling subjects such as art or spiritual belief. Lewis-Williams and Blundell (1997), for example, researched finger dots in South African rock art. Much of the art was shamanic and represented hallucinations and imagery from altered states of consciousness. The dots represented the luminous, geometric constructs perceived during an altered state. It was concluded that the light represented a type of supernatural power that was associated and accessed via synaesthesia. This is seen in the pictures which depict human and animal forms transforming into, or out of, shapes; similar to the experiences described by those who have entered a state of altered consciousness. There is

the sensation of sensual unity and people often feel fused with these geometric forms. The curving shapes of the dotted patterns mimicked the curved sensations the shamans claimed to feel through their hands when healing; combined with synaesthesia this may have given rise to the actual appearance of dots. Moreover, the very physical act of finger painting itself can be considered of some significance. Very rarely was paint placed on top of another image, only onto unused rock, suggesting that direct contact with the rock was important. The rock acted as an object between this world and the next, touching it allowed one to pass through this gateway. The paint itself was a supernatural substance which could effectively dissolve the rock so that images could be revealed. Again, here, we see the value placed upon the sense of touch rather than relying solely on one's vision, the pictures remaining after contact serving as a reminder of that contact with the other side (Lewis Williams and Blundell 1997).

It is impossible to detect, of course, whether or not the synaesthesia experienced by these shamans was natural or chemically enhanced in some way. We know that hallucinatory drugs can induce a short synesthetic state in the user. Shaman culture is often associated with the use of these substances, the blending of one's senses created what could be construed as a spiritual gateway or altered state, which could be key to their usage amongst various cultures. Archaeological and ethnographical studies have revealed some information as to the usage of such substances in shamanic ritual.

The Taino were people indigenous to the islands of the Bahamas. Before the arrival of Columbus in 1492, they had a culture revolving heavily around shamans as figures who could heal the sick, contact the spirits and predict the fertility and future of the tribe. They used a drug called cohoba to enhance their auto-hypnotic trances, a psychoactive powder from the seeds of native trees, sometimes mixed with tobacco. The shamans used the powder to communicate with spirits and ancestors, as well as curing illnesses. The drug causes the world to be perceived in an inverted way, whereby objects and people appear upside down, movements and gestures are reversed and a state of synaesthesia is induced marking everything with shifting shapes and bright colours. Their art, much like that seen in the South African finger dots, reflected this skewed vision of the world, with upside down images and skeletal spirits. The Taino culture was centred around this 'fifth direction,' namely that which involved all five of the senses and allowed the user to communicate directly with the other side (Crystal 2011).

In archaeology today synaesthesia is more widely accepted as another medium through which the past can be analysed. Sensory archaeology investigates the effects of past places and items upon the senses, seeing how these less tangible qualities may have affected the lives of past people. Whereas items may only have been previously considered in a visual sense, now investigations consider the acoustic qualities of a structure, or the physical act of craftsmanship as much as the craft itself. Experimental archaeology has played a large role in this movement, recreating past items so that archaeologists can experience their usage and effects for themselves. Ancient instruments have been reconstructed which not only give the hearer a sense of what they would have sounded like, but also the physiological effects that may have been experienced, for example the reverberations or the changes in the speed of pulses or heartbeat. Touch is a reasonably easy sense to employ, as archaeology is already quite a physical subject, but it is important to remember that materials may have been chosen

as much for their feel or way they look (or, of course, their cost and practicality!) It is, indeed, difficult to recapture an ancient smell, but ethnographic studies tell us how important this sense can be in a society. Smell is also very closely linked to memory, making it a powerful tool in the recollection of past knowledge. Finally taste, which can include eating, drinking and occasionally intoxication (not necessarily in my order of preference there). The social importance of these acts of incorporations is well-documented within the archaeological record, but it is imperative to remember that taste forms a part of everyday life; subsistence as well as feasting.

It is almost certainly together then, that the senses help us divulge our own past. One does not have to have synaesthesia to appreciate that as much as we utilise all five of our senses in our day-to-day lives, so too we can use these to recreate the day-to-day lives of our ancestors. And those of us that can perceive Friday as smelling green can use it to our advantage to uncover new and exciting archaeological truths.

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3 Relating To The Dead: Incorporating Archaeological Sites Into Our Personal Identity

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I think it is fair to say that as archaeologists we tend to attach ourselves to certain archaeological sites, primarily those that we have excavated or worked on. By being involved in these sites we become inextricably linked with them. For some people this connection will be more emphatic than others. As such I would like to discuss a site that I have been involved in. In my first year as an undergraduate at the University Of Manchester, I was privileged to dig at Domuztepe with Dr Stuart Campbell. Domuztepe is a Halaf site in southern Turkey dating c. 5700-5400BC (Carter and Campbell 2003,118), covering an area of c.20Ha (Campbell and Carter 1999,395). Despite having excavated an estimated 1 percent of the site (Campbell and Carter 2006,269), the finds have been remarkable, ranging from ordinary domestic items to strange and fascinating mortuary practice.

Arguably the most discussed facet of Domuztepe is the site of the 'Death Pit', a 2m wide, 1.5m deep pit containing the remains of over 40 humans including numerous skulls and long bones, along with other faunal remains. The remains were deposited quickly and the pit was filled within a number of weeks, topped with ash concordant with a large fire (Campbell 2007-8,129) which would have been highly visible to the inhabitants of Domuztepe. The story of those interred in the Death Pit is a grisly one, and it is obvious that they have suffered a violent death. The cause of death of the individuals whose skulls are present is a blunt force trauma to the side of the skull (Carter and Campbell 2003,123-124) which appears to be deliberate and uniform. Where the skull has been struck there are missing pieces of bone. Although from this it is apparent that these persons suffered a violent end, their bodies were abused even after death. Sarah Whitcher Kansa has analysed the bones which show evidence of cutting and butchering (Carter and Campbell 2003,121), suggesting that these bodies were still fleshed at this point, which in turn leads us to believe that this cannot have happened long after death. Although not contemporary with Domuztepe, the site of Cayonu Tepesi also shows evidence of the cutting if not butchering of human remains on a large stone slab as well as other mammals (Loy and Wood 1989,452-453). Croucher (2010) has demonstrated that bone analysis shows teeth marks and evidence of bone splitting to obtain bone marrow (Croucher 2010,8), and that this may be suggesting a cannibalistic nature to the mortuary practice at Domuztepe.

So here we are faced with a scenario, and although perhaps quite a plausible one, but an interpretation only. However, it is how I relate with the archaeology at Domuztepe. Although the Death Pit was excavated many years before I worked there, I still feel a connection, an empathetic link with those persons who were killed and interred in the Death Pit. There is no doubt in my mind that my experiences at Domuztepe as a malleable undergraduate have shaped me as a person and formed part of my identity. Studying under the Archaeology Department at Manchester with so many experts on the subject, like Dr Stuart Campbell and Dr Karina Croucher has too influenced and added to my identity, individualism and sense of being.

Relating to the dead rarely means finding common ground between us and them, the differentia are simply too vast. Instead I feel that relating to the dead is more about finding the human part of them, going further than seeing them simply as human remains. I know that for me this is hard and it usually requires some kind of personal connection between myself and the dead. When I walk through Manchester Museum I feel nothing for the mummies in the Egyptology gallery, but yet digging at Domuztepe and living in that area for six weeks gave me something in common with those interred in the Death Pit, even if I had not discovered them myself. Relating to the dead is not easy and perhaps not even academically tangible, but perhaps not entirely impossible.

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4 Adventures In Processual Theory

Erik Dougherty

As archaeologists, we are meant to be intelligent, inquisitive, thoughtful, and above all open-minded. What I find appalling is more often than not, we as a profession often forget that last caveat, aligning ourselves with various theoretical approaches and ideals in much the same way the religious hold to their respective faiths. As likely surmised by that rather bold statement, I have developed a bit of a reputation among my peers as an anti-theorist. That is not to say I do not see the relevance or value of theory in archaeology, I simply question its application. Sadly, you will have to wait for my next article to witness me throw the literary gauntlet down in an all-out assault on theory. For now, however, you can begin your journey towards enlightenment through my current offering – ‘Adventures in Processual Theory.’ Ironically, I set out to submit this article last year but decided to wait and see if my views changed over the duration of my degree course. Interestingly, they have, but not for the better...

So without further ado:

When looking at the development of the so-called “New Archaeology”, it is easy to become caught up in the ill-conceived theories and methods that came about during this time; however despite the dislike I hold for processualism, I (like many others) have to admit that it can still have its place within archaeological theory today. Widely claimed in American, Australian and British archaeological communities as the dominant theoretical position in practice, processualism has managed to separate itself from the historical connotations of the early twentieth century and claims to have associated itself with the natural, or hard, sciences (Smith 2004). However, in order to more accurately address the present, it is therefore important to review the past.

Archaeology was largely mired in the trappings of descriptive narrative without any forethought for the possibility of a clear and concise explanation of the purpose of neither artefacts nor the cultures in which they were originated. For good or ill, processualism was a key stage in the evolution of archaeology into the multidisciplinary social science we see today. Processualism was borne out of the desire to be more scientific and anthropological in the methodological approach to archaeology. This involved placing an emphasis on cultural evolution, systems thinking, adaptive culture, scientific approach and the concept of a culture process, as well as including an attempt to become more explicit about one’s biases and lastly, an understanding of variability which involved the explicit use of theory, models and generalisation (Johnson 2006; Renfrew 2004). By isolating and examining the various systems functioning within a society, as well as between societies, processualists place emphasis on environmental, economic and subsistence models and their relation to the social aspects of a given society, in order to understand the impact of prevailing ideologies and beliefs on these systems and the various social units (Renfrew 2004). This need to distance archaeology from the culture history approach of its early foundations, and to move towards a more relevant and vigorous mode of theory, led to Clarke’s famous treatise on the “loss of innocence” which characterised this paradigm shift as the price of expanding consciousness (Clarke 1973). The concept of the

expert scientific archaeology created mass public debate and conflict over the context of material culture; with the perception of heritage items transformed into archaeological data (Smith 2004). In fact, at its formative stage, processualists went so far as to accuse previous archaeologists of creating a form of 'counterfeit history' which failed to see the extent of the archaeological record available (Renfrew 2004).

Individual variability in the context of the culture-historical approach was one of the primary concerns of processualists. Hodder states the key features of this approach refer to a descriptive culture history, normative or shared beliefs, and prescriptive components to norms; i.e. the rules of behaviour (Hodder 1991). North American archaeology of the twentieth century helped to redefine this relationship between finds and the cultures from which they originated; this focus upon the classification of objects, their context and their respective impact upon the culture history relied on anthropological methods and interpretations (Greene 2002). As a result, Greene (2002) states, the position of settlements in relation to each other and to their agricultural and material resources became an important part of the New Archaeology in the 1960s. Processualism was largely responsible for inspiring advances in the systems used in the recovery of archaeological material, in addition to broadening the interpretation of said finds through a more precise methodology (Greene 2002). One positive development in processualism, according to Trigger (1997), was the creation of a systems theory in which archaeologists were allowed to apply a scientific method to their work (Trigger 1997). And while archaeologists were able to apply systems theories to their work, it was not possible to perform rigorous mathematical testing upon it, thus creating new ways of looking at models of cultural change and helping to illustrate that the application of scientific methodology to archaeology was possible (Trigger 1997). Perhaps the most significant contribution of processualism to archaeology is the attempt to include scientific method in the toolkit, and with this change that arrived at the universities and other areas of the discipline as a whole, the foundations for all the work of post-World War II was set follow (Johnson 2005).

However, processualism is inherently flawed, with its reliance on approaches that appear to lack any clearly defined form of explanation for archaeologists to use, with emphasis bearing on how that form of theory should be applied rather than how the archaeology occurs, thus leading to a far too generalised result which erodes the very credibility of these theorists. One of the key flaws of processualism was its failure to contribute an over-reaching understanding of not only the nature of the development of human culture, but also its behaviour, despite its apparent concern with the identification, as Smith (2004) states, of individual 'cultures' through the archaeological record. In 'borrowing' from the natural sciences during its development, as well as the failure to establish a link with social science models, the identification of subtle 'cultural' developments simply was not supported (Smith 2004). Gibbon summarises processualism as having largely failed to handle archaeological data as cultural material and realise an understanding of the cultural past (Gibbon 1989). More often than not, material culture was not a direct likeness of human behaviour; it was instead an adaptation of that behaviour (Hodder 1991). A distinct aversion to admit that cultural change could have been brought about through human cognisance or desire is another major flaw of processualism (Trigger 1997). Trigger states major aspects of human behaviour, such as religious beliefs,

aesthetics, and scientific knowledge received very little attention (Trigger 1997). The unconvincing nature of generalisation forced the concept that material culture is an indirect representation of human society, which misrepresents the relationship between material and cultural society (Hodder 1991). Renfrew states that the aim of producing valid generalisations remains an important goal, although to frame these as universal 'laws of cultural process' is now seen as impractical (Renfrew 1994). The reliance on such universal laws and empirical methodology stood in stark contrast to the archaeological norms of the time. Gibbon states that the reader was left with the impression that, for example, an explanation sketch, while incomplete, was an adequate form of explanation (Gibbon 1989). As such, explanation, as used by processualists, was at best incomplete, and while the models may not be wrong, in the absence of an all-inclusive unified archaeological theory, it cannot be viewed empirically (Gibbon 1989).

This was largely due to Middle Range Theory, which linked arguments between the present and the past in order to interpret the past. An example of this is seen in the handling of data concerning the heritage of native North Americans against that of Euro-American society. Rife with sweeping generalities, any cultural or spiritual identity was all but eliminated from the native peoples, reducing them to nothing more than a ruler to measure from (Trigger 1997). This has only resulted in alienating the native peoples and led to a number of legal battles as they attempt to control their past and what is to become of it (Trigger 1997). A key failure of processualism therefore is its inability to broaden in scope and remove itself from the 1950s approaches of ecology and settlement-patterns (Trigger 1997). This ultimately prejudiced their methodology and, in their narrow-minded pursuit to explain how human behaviour and social culture was shaped by surrounding ecology, failed to recognise the all-encompassing aspects that underpin society and transform it into the cultural history that is left behind (Trigger 1997). The aim should be to incorporate, as Hodder suggests, both meaning and agency into archaeological theory, by using a number of means to interpret the past such as material culture symbolism, cultural meanings, intentions and purposes (Hodder 1991).

Despite its many failings, processualism was very much a product of its day: influenced by the society, culture and politics of the world the archaeologists found themselves in and without its theories and approaches, archaeology as we know it may very well have ceased to be. However, in moving from the past and into the present, just as the discipline moved into the latter twentieth century, a number of archaeologists became increasingly suspicious of not only the interpretations of finds, but also their methods, which were considered at best, nothing more than contrived and superficial 'stories' used to support the socio-political agenda (Greene 2002). Dubbing themselves postprocessualists, these archaeologists engaged philosophical and anthropological interpretive theory in an attempt to shift the focus from that of the generalised socio-environmental process to that of the individual human experience (Greene 2002). Postprocessualists argue that our interpretation is weighted by the influences we accumulate as a result of our respective socio-cultural and even environmental experiences and therefore the result is we cannot but help utilise some form of a biased theoretical perspective in archaeological investigations (Greene 2002). Furthermore, it has been suggested that while processualism did have a role in the development of archaeological thought, and the paradigm

shift away from the antiquarian role of data-collection and artefact acquisition, it was not key; it was a further step towards a better understanding of the past (Johnson 2006). Conversely, as postprocessualists point out, traditional archaeology was not as narrow-minded in its approach of its methodology as suggested, however the issues raised by processualism were relevant despite the fact its criticisms may have not been wholly accurate (Johnson 2006).

With the weight of the article's context in mind, is it healthy for processualism to hold a dominant position in archaeological theory today? The answer in lieu of the evidence must be a resounding "no". However, just as we have a number of implements that can be utilised in the field, so too do we have a series of approaches that we as archaeologists can apply to our methodology. This concept should be at the very heart of theory: theory is a toolset that relates to the total sum of the archaeological record. In other words, instead of aligning ourselves to a particular brand of theory as if it were our religion, we should instead view theory as an all-encompassing approach which suggests that you look beyond the standard line of thought, and take those elements from theory that work within the context of your own methodology, and use these as an integrated toolset to achieve your desired results.

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5 Anti-postprocessualism: a new hope

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Some months have passed since my article on archaeological theory was published in The Post Hole (see issue 13). Since then, there has been a critique of my argument by the esteemed David Roberts (2010, see issue 14), and a variety of personal reactions by people in my department, all of which I would like to now address in this follow-up.

Post-post processualism?

I will turn first to several points by Roberts, whose position has been to take a positive view of post-processualism rather than a negative one. In contrast to my problem with its slipperiness and incoherence, he emphasises its decentralisation and self-criticism:

“This maelstrom of theory has led to some processual archaeologists bemoaning post-processualism’s ‘chameleon-like’ nature, which change their form under criticism but maintain their essential characteristics... This is not, however, a function of ‘post-processual’ scholars’ inherently slippery and sly nature... but rather a natural outcome of the attempts by processualist scholars to squeeze the multiple and often contradictory theories of those disagreeing with them into the neat boxes and categories of which their ‘systems thinking’.”

All this would be very well, if it were not for the fact that in his very next paragraph he dismisses all indefensible post-processual positions (such as those by Shanks, Tilley and Bender) as ‘extreme’, and all those he favours as ‘subtle’ - in fact, he even brands them under a different name, ‘holistic contextualism’! He follows this up by securing his position: all critiques of his point of view would be ‘systems thinking’. This is apparently directed at processualists, but it also applies to both myself, and other ‘extremist’ post-processualists unfortunate enough to appear on Roberts’ radar. Where is the promised debate? Where is the progressive self-criticism? Roberts has evacuated it to an elite club of his holistic contextualist friends, of course.

He has a second point to make about theory in Roman archaeology: it is that post-processualism has opened up debate in this sphere, rather than (as I argued) taken the emphasis away from urbanism and economy and handed it to acculturative models and identity. In this he has little reply except in his claim that post-processualism has gone beyond the ‘desolate systems of processualism’ in integrating the functional with the social, improving the debate over urbanism (contra Preece 2010). In addition:

“These studies have in common a concern with rigorous data gathering, particularly excavation and geoarchaeological survey”

More discerning readers might draw significant links between those ‘rigid’ and ‘desolate’ systems and Roberts’ ‘rigorous data gathering’ - in investing in excavation techniques he is deliberately ignoring debates regarding the value of intrusive archaeology by post-processualists in archaeological academia (see Shanks & McGuire 1996; Tilley 1989; and Lucas 2001).

Of course, he could jettison these notions as ideas ‘contradictory’ to his, as he threatened in the first quote, if it were not for the fact that he has already attacked processualism and its mechanical nature. If we are to accept that half

his ideas are processual, and that he is making a deliberate choice to stand up to the anti-excavation-shift of Shanks/McGuire/Tilley/Lucas fame, where does he stand?

I am not proposing that we categorise archaeological thought into ‘processual’ and ‘post-processual’ -I think it is pointless to try- but Roberts has already demonstrated a willingness to do so, drawing sharp distinctions between ‘old thought’ and ‘new thought’. As I argued last year, we should not be afraid to emphasise the links between the traditional discipline and the post-processual frameworks.

The democracy charge

Other responses to my article that I have encountered personally seem to have been cautiously appraising, or outright nervous. A large part of it might be bemusement: post-processualism is almost universally accepted amongst the staff, and also among students inclined towards theory. Post-processualism, furthermore, has always been championed as the David to processualism’s Goliath; a rebel cause that has long since forgotten that it is now the one calling the shots. But there is also a more developed reaction I am encountering for the first time, and it goes something like this:

“Post-processualism accepts everyone’s point of view and evaluates them all as valid. So, although you may not like post-processualism, you have to admit it’s better at making archaeology much more accessible to the public, more egalitarian, and less scientific.”

While it is important to recognise that many post-processualists have expressed a commitment to open archaeology up to the public, and that this has all sorts of benefits attached to it, it is ridiculous to suggest that no-one before 1980 attempted to do so. What really is new about the post-processualist strategy is the idea that we should democratise archaeology: get non-archaeologists involved. This is where Shanks and McGuire (1996), Tilley (1989) and Lucas (2001) come in. They believe that only the interpretation side of excavation matters, so we should produce archaeology for them, not for our research agenda or scientific credentials. Roberts is right in that not everyone is agreed in post-processualism and none of the above views exactly align. Another post-processualist, Cornelius Holtorf, even goes one step further by claiming we need to introduce ‘public inreach’ (Holtorf 2007a), embracing clichés and the private sector along the way. In his relativist philosophy, the public perception of archaeology is just as valid as the academic one, and perhaps better because of the lack of ivory towers (see Holtorf 2007b, esp. chapter 6). While I am not against the principles of democracy or egalitarianism, I do think there are problems associated with letting non-professionals and developers set the agenda, and that research agendas are not just rags of paper with ‘science’ written on them. Without research agendas we would not be able to determine what potential sites might hold, and, having excavated it, what the relevance is in light of previous discoveries. Relating to the public what we have found is not ‘elitism’, it is merely one community of professionals -defined as people who have dedicated their lives to focusing on material culture- telling those who are only casually interested what might be going on. If this is done in an elitist way, it is being done wrong; it is not the structure of the relationship that is at fault, but the attitude of the researcher.

Conclusion

I could write further, but there is only so much I can include in this article. But to summarise, the purpose of the last article -and this one- was and never has been to demolish anyone's entire philosophy. It has been intended as a challenge to post-processualists to explain themselves, to fully acknowledge the debt that they owe others who have gone before, and to attack some assumptions that are taken for granted. If this has inspired rethink and debate, this is all to the good -I believe that Roberts' defense of post-processualism has not protected it at all. Rather, it seems that he has abandoned huge sections of it in order to advance another distinct framework. If others were to do the same, we would really discard the binary purgatory that is the post-processualism/processualism debate.

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6 A reply to Preece: The Second Time Around

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The empirical methodology predominates in reality everywhere, seeming to risk ignoring known elements seen by archaeologists creating knowledge. Visualisations and discussions engage readers.

I would firstly like to thank Preece for allowing me the opportunity to comment on his reply to my constructive comments (Roberts 2010) on his original article (Preece 2010). In this short reply I will attempt to move our debate forward constructively and outline my own position more clearly, hopefully provoking wider debate. I suspect that both Preece and myself agree that this debate will only prove useful if it interests others in archaeology.

Roman Archaeology

Preece rightly attacks my lack of attention to the theoretical developments of Roman archaeology in my previous article. This was simply due to a lack of space, so I drew on urbanism as the example that Preece (2010) had previously selected, and suggested that new studies may have led us towards a more nuanced understanding of urbanism in Roman Britain. I would agree that some recent studies of urbanism in Roman Britain (e.g. Mattingly 2006) have placed significant emphasis on identity and perhaps acculturation (the two are by no means inseparable) but that earlier studies failed to acknowledge the role of the individual or of groups with elements of shared identity, thereby denying themselves explanatory access to a significant factor in change over time. Of course, certain factors of urban development brought to prominence by earlier studies are still widely acknowledged to have played a major role in urban development, such as the logistical demands of the military. The work of Rogers (2008) for example, moves the debate forward, bringing considerations of identity, religious practice and landscape into the urbanism debate, allowing a more nuanced approach to be taken in understanding the foundation of some Roman towns. Whilst Rogers (2008) takes account of the military's forceful role in urban development, he does not exclude the agency of the existing inhabitants of Britain from a role in shaping development in the context of Roman conquest and the conflict, tension and violence associated with it.

Arguments such as that put forward by Rogers (2008) widen the compass of our understanding without departing from a basis in archaeological investigation. The dichotomy Preece (2011) sets up between post-processualism and data-gathering is not borne out by the emerging consensus, which as Preece (2011) suggests, has the agreement of the vast majority of academics, but importantly does not (contra Preece 2011) equate to agreement with the relativistic anti-excavation theories of some (more avowedly) post-processual scholars. The 'post-processual' consensus that is beginning to emerge is only a consensus in the widest possible sense, and is only 'post-processual' in the way that it has moved on from processualism by widening the topics of debate and accepting some of the better-founded critiques made of the paradigm (e.g. lack of explanation for

change over time, lack of consideration of agency or identity, over-emphasis on systems), along with some of the strengths of processual thought (e.g. clear methodologies, statistically assessable data where relevant or possible, quality archiving and recording, and deep engagement with economic and environmental concerns).

Holistic Contextualism

Holistic contextualism, then, might be said to be archaeological practice and thought that tries to engage with the material remains of the past in multiple ways, both through multiple field survey methods (e.g. Earl 2009), and conceiving of multiple understandings of the past in the past and the present. Multiple does not, as Preece (2011) rightly suggests that some assert, mean a relativist stance in either the present or the past, but acknowledges the complex and interacting actors (both human and non-human) which shape the formation of the archaeological record, both in the present and the past, and the role of archaeologists in translating the material record through quality practice and critical thought. Of course this is difficult, but attempts have been made with some success, such as Walsh (2008), and Webster (2001) regarding the interaction of multiple agents/actors in the past (these are not synonymous terms but there is not space to discuss this issue in the detail it merits in this piece), and Farid (2000) regarding the archaeological process in the present. This vision of the practice of archaeology therefore partially agrees with Preece (2011) in his assertion that archaeologists have a meaningful role to play in interpreting the past to the public, but also acknowledging that public knowledge or understanding may on some occasions rightly cause us to question assumptions we have made, or contribute new knowledge to our understandings that change our interpretations.

Further Debate

I hope that the above paragraphs have sufficiently delineated my position for the purposes of critical debate in future, and in return I would challenge Preece to come forward with his own vision for how archaeology should be undertaken. If Preece is serious regarding the rebirth of classic processualism then he needs to not only critique its kaleidoscope of successors, but also find an answer to the criticisms now widely accepted by the academic community, and demonstrate its continuing relevance. Hopefully, however, Preece will attempt to move forward towards a new framework so that further debate can be undertaken with a useful and relevant outcome.

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7 An Interview With Angela Clark

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Angela Clark is a doctorate student at the University of Otago, in New Zealand. Her research is focused on Southeast Asian human remains, and last summer, she presented a paper at the European Meeting of Palaeopathology Association, discussing the relationship between sexual dimorphism and health status. I had a few questions for the busy bioarchaeologist, and thankfully she gracefully and speedily replied.

CC- What are your current projects?

AC- Currently, I am examining skeletons from a site called Ban Non Wat in Northeast Thailand. We are really fortunate to have nearly 700 skeletons dating from the Neolithic period (1750 B.C – 1050 B.C), the Bronze Age (1050 – 420 B.C) and the Iron Age (420 B.C – A.D 500). I specifically examine the adult skeletons, looking at the differences in size and shapes between the males and females. The level of sexual dimorphism has not yet been intensively studied in prehistoric Southeast Asia. The main aim of my PhD thesis is to assess how the level of sexual dimorphism relates to the health status of the prehistoric people from Ban Non Wat, and determine if we see changes over time associated with the intensification of rice agriculture and changing social-political structure.

CC- What is it like to excavate in Southeast Asia? Do you encounter any difficulties in obtaining permission to study the human remains?

AC- Professor Charles Higham (University of Otago) originally set up the “Origins of Angkor project” in Thailand over twenty years ago, and has formed a great working relationship with the National Research Council, the Fine Arts Department and the people of Thailand. They have graciously permitted our research to continue and it is our privilege to work with these human remains.

CC- When you work in the countryside, are the locals supportive of your work? Are some really interested to know what you do?

AC- The site of Ban Non Wat is located in a small village; 40 minutes drive from the small town where we stay called Phimai (population size: 13,000). The locals have been involved in the excavations from the beginning. The field season takes place in winter, this is after the annual rice harvest and normally the locals would have to leave the village to find work in the nearest town. We provide paid work for the villagers to enable them to stay at home for the winter months. After seven field seasons some of them have become so skilled with a trowel they come close to out-doing the professional archaeologists! Although, I know my job is safe, when it comes to human remains excavation only the skilled and experienced bioarchaeologists are needed. Although, most of the locals find the fact that we study human remains very strange indeed and would not touch the bones anyway.

CC- What is your greatest memory of your time in Southeast Asia?

AC- Christmas time in Phimai is always great fun. Last year there were about 17 of us for Christmas Eve dinner, where we had sort-of traditional roast pork dinner with a few Thai specialties. There was Christmas music, decorations and even a glowing christmas tree! On Christmas Day all the farang (Western’) archaeologists went to Ban Non Wat with gifts. The local villagers cooked a spectacular lunch and ate it outside until the sunset. Then everybody, the villagers and farang, gathers for a secret-Santa, but of course in typical Thai

style there was no Santa and it definitely isn't a secret! Each person's name is put into a hat, if you are chosen you go up onto a small stage, and then receive a gift from that person already on stage. Then you choose a name of a villager out of a hat, and then give your gift to that villager. That villager then stays on stage and picks the name of a farang to give their present to, and this cycle continues until everyone, villager and farang gets a gift. The evening ended with a lot of dancing, laughing and was in all a great Christmas!

CC- How did you become interested in human bones and Southeast Asia?

AC- I aspired to work with human remains from a young age, and I have been fulfilling my vocation for a while now. Originally I undertook a Forensic Science (BSc) at the University of Central Lancashire, specialising in forensic anthropology. This inspired me to continue in a very focused field. After completing a Master of Science in Human Osteology and Paleopathology, at the University of Bradford, I travelled across the globe gaining many personal and professional experiences. At this point I joined Dr. Nancy Tayles from the University of Otago, New Zealand, whilst she conducted her research in Thailand. I worked for a month in the field, doing a mixture of excavation and post-ex work. From my travels, I ended up moving to New Zealand in June 2009 to embark on a PhD. My bioarchaeology research group at the Department of Anatomy and Structural Biology, University of Otago, specialise in human remains from Southeast Asia and the Pacific. I am particularly interested in prehistoric mainland Southeast Asian populations, as little research has been conducted in this area. There are lots of questions which still remain unanswered about the demography, health status, movement, interaction between populations, the social, cultural and economic factors and the interaction with the natural tropical monsoon environment.

CC- What are your plans for future research?

AC- For now, I am continuing with my PhD, which I should finish in another 18 months. There are many opportunities for further research in Southeast Asia and I hope to answer a few more research questions after my PhD is completed.

CC- Is the weather pleasant? Or is it more difficult to work in such tropical conditions?

AC- I am currently in the field until the end of February, so I can give you a first-hand account. Right now, it is over 30 degrees celcius inside, we have a fan that is cooling us down – but this is quite a mild day. Just having arrived from a very hot summer in New Zealand, I haven't found the transition that bad this year, and the heat is quite bearable. There are, however, some down sides to the seasonal weather. The recent flooding in Thailand hit the global news, and we got quite a scare with the prospect that our collection could be ruined due to the flooding. However, we were extremely lucky, as our storage house wasn't affected at all, the bones are in great condition and we are able to carry on with our research. Thankfully, natural disasters like this only happen every decade or so... hopefully I will have finished my research by then!