

## FOREWORD

This book breaks ground in a number of ways. It is therefore not surprising that the text introduces concepts to which the archaeological ear is unaccustomed. This difficulty should not dissuade us from grappling with the challenge. For this is also an extremely important book which issues in a new generation of archaeology - a new age of a philosophically informed and critically aware discipline.

It is easy to gain the impression that archaeology lags behind related disciplines. Archaeologists hung on to, and even embraced, positivism long after serious scepticism had been established elsewhere. Functionalism and systems theory were adopted as if the critique of functionalism and the notion of structure did not exist. At a more detailed scale, spatial archaeology owed much to the New Geography, David Clarke's (1972) *Models in Archaeology* was modelled on Chorley and Haggett's (1967) *Models in Geography* as earlier Glyn Daniel's (1962) *Idea of Prehistory* borrowed from Collingwood's (1946) *Idea of History*. Undoubtedly some counter-influences could be cited, but the general pattern of a retarded borrowing is well established.

One reason why this book is demanding to read is that it suddenly asks archaeologists to catch up. Having for so long been content with a limited theoretical field and having only recently begun to grapple with structuralism and limited aspects of contemporary Marxism, the archaeologist is now asked to jump beyond structuralism to post-structuralism, and to consider also critical theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and realist and post-positivist philosophy. I am not sure that archaeology as a whole will be able quickly and effectively to enter the debate, and in a sense the book may be before, or out of, its time. Archaeological teaching and literature have much to absorb before the full implications of the ideas discussed here will be adequately criticized and assessed in relation to different bodies of archaeological data. But what the book does do, courageously, is to set us a target. Shanks and Tilley offer an integration of a variety of contemporary social theories in relation to archaeological data. In trying to understand what they have done, our own level of debate is raised. That this is a demanding book should not dismay us. Our task over the next decade is to educate ourselves so that we can read this book.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of archaeology since its inception has been its predominantly empiricist and positivist orientations. The break with this tradition is a particular way in which Shanks and Tilley prepare new ground. The debate has always been couched in terms of the confrontation and interaction between subjective and objective views. The fear of a cynical relativism has always lurked around the corner for those attempting to walk towards the subjective components of human experience. The

empiricist and positivist emphases remained dominant, even if at times they seemed to take insufficient account of the role of the analyst, situated in his or her time.

Shanks and Tilley seek to transcend the tired divide between subjective and objective approaches. They place emphasis on the social practice of the interdependence between the real and the theoretical. Many will want to argue as to whether it is adequate to claim that archaeology is ideological practice which sustains and justifies a capitalist present. At times in this volume the reader will be faced with the issue as to whether the past is any more than politics and manipulation in the present. But whatever the individual viewpoint, Shanks and Tilley have pitched the archaeological analyst more fully into the scene. The presentation of the past is no longer simply the concern of the government official, but of all archaeologists, since all archaeological texts re-present the world of today in the past. It is hardly surprising then, that a portion of this book is devoted to the role of the museum. Theory and practice are integrally linked.

As part of the alternative viewpoint offered in this volume, the past is seen as a forum for debate. There is not one meaning in the past to be discovered. The process of archaeology involves polysemy and debate. This spirit of discussion and the rejection of a unified agreed methodology contrast significantly with the strictures of the New Archaeology. And it is in this spirit that this book should be read. The question to be asked is not 'is the view of the world described by Shanks and Tilley correct?' but 'do we agree with it, and if not, why not?'

It has been argued by many in archaeology that the New Archaeology was more a methodological than a theoretical breakthrough. A final way in which this volume is novel, both in relation to recent and traditional archaeology, is that it can legitimately claim to propose a radical theoretical proposition. Basic philosophical and theoretical proposals stretching from the nature of archaeology, to the relationship between individual and society, structure and action are discussed. The nature of material culture is questioned and the meaning of style.

Few who read this book will remain unabsorbed by some new angle on their taken-for-granted, their assumed dogmas. Shanks and Tilley challenge us to think - to think harder, deeper, more critically. In so far as they encourage argument about silent issues, the authors will have achieved their purpose, and ours.

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