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Archaeology and Indian Identity - Recent Developments in the Americas

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INTRODUCTION

Polish archaeology has usually been skeptical of new approaches and basically remained (even in the mid 1990s) as an object-based study. Typological classifications, ancient technologies and chronological problems still are among the main topics in current archaeology. The rapid social and economic change has not been followed by transformations in archaeological practice. It is observed that with the spread of the values of capitalistic economy social attitudes towards archaeology have changed over the last 7 years. This tendency was even emphasized by the state's cultural policy. We can perceive that the cultural resource management becomes more marketable, available to consumption. In the conditions of so-called free market economy archaeological museums are turned into craft shops. This tendency is not followed by museum exhibitions. Archaeological exhibitions still display standardized, mythical and demagogic imaginary of the past in which national collective identities are emphasized. Free market economy is not followed by free choice in the market of archaeological history. Even now the knowledge of particular visions of the past of Polish national minorities is known to a limited audience. The University departments did not offer courses of alternative archaeologies, nor the archaeologists of Ukrainian, Lithuanian or German origin are allowed to present their interpretations of the past. The problem of minority interpretation of the past virtually does not exist in Polish archaeology.

In my opinion, the relationship between archaeology and native or indigenous peoples should be reconsidered by my Polish colleagues. As an archaeologist who spent some time in Latin America doing archaeology I can offer some thoughts concerning this

topic and this is why I decided to prepare the present paper in English rather than in Spanish.

MYTHS, SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

For a long time American archaeology treated indigenous peoples as being simple, static, unprogressive and even unable to evolve beyond the Stone Age. Native American remains were not regarded as part of the cultural heritage of Western civilization, on the contrary, colonial archaeologies denigrated cultural achievements of Indians exposing their inferiority to justify white hegemony. Also in North America the native Indian inhabitants were assumed to be incapable of cultural evolution and any cultural progress must have come from the outside. Obviously such claims served to justify and legitimize the conquest, ethnocide and incorporation of their vast territories into the domain of European settlement [Trigger 1980]. Since American archaeology looked at native American peoples as unchanging societies or living fossils of what was known in the European Palaeolithic [Trigger 1984: 361], any systematic study of living Indian societies and of cultural remains dated between few thousand years B.C. and A.D. were regarded as basically the same.

In the turn of the 20th century were initiated Latin American archaeologies. Latin American archaeologists, like Europeans before them, tended to emphasize material remains and cultural achievements of ancient civilizations to settle their discipline into the center of political discourse which in turn led to the creation of nationalist archaeologies. By validating ancestral achievements and glorifying architectural and other manifestations of splendid heritage, Latin American scholars used archaeology to create common national past. They tended to be concerned with recent history (that of the Incas or the Aztecs) more than with the remote one because their aim was to emphasize state identity, cultural homogeneity and historical distinctiveness.

For example, In Mexico after the Revolution of 1910 archaeology became a part of *indigenismo* [Fowler 1987: 234]. Excavations were carried out in big cultural centers which were restored and opened to the public. Massive education of the Mexican nation took place at those sites providing symbols of shared identity. Those great and famous sites were utilized to create the common past providing national collective identities in the same way as did European archaeologies in the 19th century. It may be observed [Fowler 1987: 234] that the validation of brilliant architectural achievements at monumental sites of Teotihuacán, Chichén Itzá or Monte Albán was associated with the minimalization of regional differences and the syncretized vision of Mexican past was exemplified through the Aztec Empire of which the present state has been thought to be a legitimate successor [Fowler 1987: 234]. The policy of dignifying and honoring the past encouraged indigenous minorities, but on the other side, it turned to be „a substitute for the far-reaching economic and social reforms promised by the revolution” [Trigger

1984: 359]. This situation is now challenged by indigenous communities. In conditions of the growing knowledge of the past those communities may at least keep those sites as „bastions of their identity” [see: Lowenthal 1994: 309] as suggest examples from other parts of the world.

Processual or „new” archaeology took account of the sociocultural development Indian societies. However, as Trigger [1980: 670-671] observes, generalizations about human behavior were much more important research goals than the reconstruction of the past of the North American natives. It has been assumed that the knowledge of those universal generalizations about human behavior could have practical value in modern society while the study of Indian prehistory has been considered as unimportant since any study of any national past was denied and suppressed [Trigger 1984: 366-367]. In other words, archaeologists who studied material culture remains in North America were not interested in the reconstruction of the history of its peoples. Trigger [1980: 671] described this situation as follows: „archaeologists have chosen to use data concerning the native peoples of North America for ends that have no special relevance to these people”. Archaeology became more and more was alienated from the Indians, although it should be noticed that technologically and environmentally oriented archaeologists developed ethnoarchaeology, a discipline that could have bring them into a direct contact with the natives.

Latin American archaeologies intended to challenge postulates of „new” archaeology. New Archaeology was associated with American imperialism [Trigger 1984]. The liberation of archaeology from the restrains of history, proclaimed by New Archaeologists, was rejected by Latin American national archaeologies. However, in their aspiration to challenge New Archaeology many of Latin American archaeologists did not escape the pitfalls of other imperialistic archaeologies with which they aligned. Marxist and structural or poststructural archaeologies of French and British origin are other manifestations of imperialistic ideology [Trigger 1984], though they recognize the value of national studies. Structural and Marxist archaeologies which were easily disseminated in Latin American countries [Olive Negrete 1988] although aware of national approaches tended to produce rather unilateral schemes of cultural development viewed as evidence of contradictions within societies.

Latin American archaeology is also a colonial archaeology (to use Trigger’s [1984] terms). The archaeological past is reduced to the history of the chosen dominant Indian groups. Thus for example in Mexico is emphasized the history of the Aztecs (with Teotihuacán and Tula being considered as their predecessors). Although the Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, Tarascan, Totonac, or Huastec remains have been regarded as part of the cultural heritage of Mexican Indians, the vast territories in the North have not been examined archaeologically until recent times. In other South American countries the past is usually viewed through the achievements of a few dominant Indian peoples.

This distortion in museum presentations of the past is evident in Latin America.

Due to its European origin, the archaeology in Latin American countries consists of a series of object-oriented studies (chronology and typology emphasized) which are then ecologically and economically contextualized and homogenized to produce comparative approaches (influences of New Archaeology and Marxists and structuralist approaches to archaeology). In general terms it reflects the aspirations of capitalistically-oriented societies living in semidemocratic and semitotalitarian states.

The changes which underwent Western societies in the past 20 years are mirrored by the development of so-called post-processual or post-modern archaeology. The emergence of liberal and ecologically oriented motivations of ideological, political and economical activities of modern Western societies was paired with the growing tendency to re-read own history and the politization of local and peripheral social groups. It's not the place to summarize the debate which occurred among mostly British archaeologists in the 1980s which led from the critics of New Archaeology to the formulation of contextual approach to the interpretation of material culture (I. Hodder, M. Shanks, C. Tilley, D. Miller). Culture is defined as a constituted meaningfully symbolic system of practices and behavior [Hodder 1995: 18-19] and this implies that in order to interpret material culture adequately it's necessary to define their context. Not only the context of material culture remains is considered but also the knowledge of the context of the scholar who is studying it is regarded in the process of interpretation and reconstruction of the past. In this sense, the tendency to contextualize artefacts challenges modern fashions of universalism, globalism, and homogeneity which rather favor a total decontextualization of meanings and symbols (for example, postmodernism in art and architecture: Hodder 1989: 68).

It is my opinion that Latin American societies will hardly accept that their ethnic or national minorities developed their own visions of the past. Societies who have lived at the best in semidemocratic or semitotalitarian states are not prepared to accept the claims on the past by minorities (this may be exemplified by the recent events in Chiapas). In Latin America archaeology was always used to legitimate new states by giving them a single, uniform and common past, it was never used to show that there have been different ethnic or national groups within the same state that have different histories.

It may be anticipated that indigenous ethnicity involves the special relationship with archaeology since archaeology has always been of great significance in the establishment of cultural, national, or ethnic identities. However, the claims on the past by indigenous communities may not necessarily lead to the establishment of their authentic identity, rather they may be related to the claims on the mineral or natural resources of particular area. Different needs of particular social groups, be they economic, socio-psychological, political, or even religious, may motivate them to use archaeological

evidence to legitimate their claims. In such cases archaeology has always played an important role in the arguments.

Before entering the field let me say one thing more. It is obvious that archaeologists do not produce physical remains of past cultures and peoples in a neutral way. Archaeological sites are selected according to a variety of reasons, their interpretations are ideologically charged and serve to establish individual careers. Also museum exhibitions display selective visions of the past. Archaeology controls the access to the past and manipulates it to legitimize its utility in modern societies. Indigenous groups possess their own visions of the past but usually they lack the direct access to its material remains. They also manipulate the past to counter the values of Western societies but their knowledge of their history does not affect Western societies since they do not control education.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY: EXAMPLES THE NARRAGANSETT OF THE UNITED STATES

In the past twenty years American archaeologists realized that their discipline should face cultural and political aspirations of Native Americans. Situated within the context of modern capitalist societies and of Eurocentric science American archaeologists studied material remains of past peoples whose descendants lived in localized sites nearby. Frequently the values of a modern science are in opposition with the values of traditional North American practices and a federal law which is established to protect Indian cultural standards challenges the claims of archaeology. The treatment of human remains is a well-known example of such a conflict (consult, for example: Klesert, Andrews 1988).

The Narragansett concern with their historical past and the development of their own identity have been stimulated, at least partially, by the state's demands [Nassaney 1989]. American Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, suspended the process of ethnic disintegration and ditribalization and initiated the way to be fully acknowledged by authorities. As Nassaney [1989: 81] notices in the process of being recognized as a tribal community the Narragansett should have demonstrate that there were individuals who could be acknowledged as Narragansett. Among other things this led the Narragansett to write their own history.

The clue problem of regaining the status of a member of Narragansett community the ethnic and cultural identity should have been defined. According tho their beliefs, *Cautantowwit*, a god-creator, resided at the south-west quadrant and the spirits of the dead were thought to return to his house to continue a new life in an afterlife. Death was considered as the beginning of a new phase in life, the journey to *Cautantowwit* house as a rite of passage, so the persons were buried in foetal or flexed position [Nassaney 1989: 81-82]. Narragansett ideology affirmed that their ethnic identity and society persisted because they resisted European acculturation. Their community consisted of

direct descendants of the 17th century Narragansett who did not merge with the others and were biologically and genetically „pure” [Nassaney 1989: 85]. In 1982 excavations carried out in southern New England (site RI 1000) revealed the existence of a cemetery of Indian origin. The Narragansett claimed to be direct descendants of the population buried in RI 1000. Since it was located on the territory claimed to be occupied by the Narragansett in the 17th century, the members of community participated in excavations and monitored the investigation [Nassaney 1989: 82].

However, archaeological excavations uncovered a different story. The individuals whose skeletons were unearthed at RI 1000 were buried with European goods which exhibit traces of reworking. The graves are rectangular in shape, grave goods were of European origin, the skeletons were extended and systematically oriented with the heads directed to the south-west.

Two visions of history have been found. Archaeological evidence suggests that cultural interaction between the Narragansett and Europeans was developed with the advanced process of borrowing from the European culture. Nevertheless, that cultural borrowing may be interpreted as a means of the Narragansett to cope with and accommodate to the European culture within the context of their own cultural tradition. European items found in graves could denote social relations between the Narragansett and may be even considered as prestige goods. A regular shape of grave pits seems to imitate of European rectangular graves. Individuals are buried extended instead of being placed in a fetal or flexed position. However, those concepts, borrowed from the Europeans, were placed within the context of traditional beliefs: the skeletons were oriented along the sacred Narragansett direction. So this spatial configuration reflects rather new concepts arising in conditions of a very rapid social change. Not a „hard” resistance to the Europeans but a very complex process of borrowing and acculturation that leaves space for ethnic identity is here observed.

It has also been demonstrated that the Narragansett merged with the Niantic, other tribe on Rhode Island and the name of Narragansett preserved [Nassaney 1989: 81]. This means that the modern Narragansett can no more be considered as direct descendants from the ancestors.

This example shows us that archaeological reconstruction of the past contradicts the traditional vision of the history as maintained by Narragansatt. Although the Narragansatt vision of the past does not coincides with archaeological reconstructions, they both are the products of the present and serve different purposes. While the Narragansatt version produces their ethnic identity, the archaeological one establishes the criteria of their ethnicity from the point of view of standards of modern archaeology.

BELIZE: A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY AT EL PILAR

The first phases of the Belize River Archaeological Settlement Survey (BRASS) directed by Anabel Ford (University of California, Santa Barbara) uncovered the great ceremonial-administrative center in El Pilar. The excavations carried out at El Pilar revealed evidence of a stratified sequence extending over 1000 years. El Pilar started as a small village around 300 BC and evolved into the Classic Maya city-state with its palaces, pyramids, ceremonial plazas, platforms, ways, etc. Standard archaeological work documented the changes from Protoclassic to Late Postclassic (300 BC - AD 750) of El Pilar which at its greatness occupied around 100 acres and controlled obsidian blade production and distribution within the entire Belize River area [Ford 1995].

The major BRASS goals were spatial and contextual patterns of artifactual remains discovered through archaeological survey. Settlement patterns and occupational areas were identified and related to topographical features and soil characteristics. El Pilar society's relationship to the natural resources and environmental parameters were studied as a part of a processual archaeology.

El Pilar was then opened for the tourists and this movement started to provide some benefits for the local community people. Also electricity and communication facilities eventually improved life conditions of the local Belizeans. All those investments brought serious changes in the development of the new identity of the Belizean community in the vicinity [Humphrey 1995]. It has been ethnically and genetically mixed mainly deriving from the Maya and Negroes. The creation of the new community, physically mirrored in the buildings of the new habitation center, involved the emergence of the new social-cultural unit. This new community is governed by a local council and is based on new integrative mechanisms which are more typical for Western civilization rather than for local Mayan or Negro ways of thinking. Community integration was reinforced through the establishment of the El Pilar Society and other organization established in the US gathered financial and material support for the further development of the local community. It should be also observed that the central government in Belize City, guided by the Western concepts of natural and cultural heritage preservation and management, decided that ancient ruins and rare fauna and flora specimens should be protected in a special reserve, in the area which for the millennia has been exploited by the Maya.

Old patterns-for-life (e.g. slash-and burn agriculture in the jungle) should be abandoned and gradually replaced with the new ones (e.g. tourist service). This does not imply a total destruction of old ways of life, thus the visitors can observe the daily life of the Maya before entering the nucleus of the archaeological site at El Pilar, or can they purchase chert tools produced by the Maya at the site.

In the 1990s however, the original research project has been enlarged. The El Pilar/BRASS project gave birth to the El Pilar Reserve for Maya Flora and Fauna. On the Guatemalan part was created El Pilar Poniente national park connected to El Pilar. There

are plans to extend to Mexico to link the remains of the tropical rain forest in the whole area. There is also a new initiative which proposes to create a pan Central American tropical rain forest corridor, called Panther's Passage, which runs from Costa Rica to Guatemala [Car III 1995]. The development of those new projects agreed with the new (and Western) way of looking at conservation and management. Associated with the concept of an eco-tourism this new project intended to reconcile between the needs of the local Belizean community at El Pilar with long-term solutions needed for the preservation and management of the whole area. Nevertheless, to prepare a path for the future, local cultural traditions of the Maya and Negroes should have been abandoned to give a way for those which can integrate the whole region. This in turn, raised problems among local communities for whom universal or global values have been totally alien. The pan-regional interests designed by the Western scholars, economists and politicians have not convinced sufficiently local native communities who did not oversee benefits for themselves, nor were they perceived as descending from local traditions. In El Pilar where the leaders of a local community became more independent of archaeologists, the development of eco-tourism has not been seen as contributing to the improvement of living standards and traditional slash-and-burn agriculture has not been abandoned. The goals of scientifically guided and globally-oriented processual archaeologists and the needs of a local community simply did not coincide one with other.

RUINS, SHAMANISM AND ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE MAYA

Ethnographical reports affirm that a great number of indigenous societies in the world view prehistoric ruins as the homes of their ancestors or supernatural beings. In other words, although both in ethnic-genetic and cultural terms there is no direct link between the prehistoric societies and modern ethnic groups, the relationship between the ruins and indigenous peoples expresses some sort of continuity (this is necessary to maintain a common set of beliefs or to participate in territorial demands). In the case of the modern Maya this direct continuity has been preserved both in ethnic-genetic and cultural and in religious-ideological terms. In this vein, the ruins of the Maya city-states in Central America have been always viewed as the burial places of their ancestors. They have been considered as their sacred places where certain ceremonies should have been performed. The ruins remain an essential part of their cultural environment and may serve as loci where particular actions are taken to re-create and re-negotiate their relations with the dead and supernatural beings. Since the rites and ceremonies are drawn upon particular sets of knowledge, they also re-produce cosmovisions, conceptual schema for the ordering of experience which in turn support ethnic identities.

For a long time, archaeologists studied the ruins as if they were of non-Maya origin. Aesthetic values of the Maya monuments were judged from the Eurocentric point of

view, the original meanings of particular objects and monuments were ignored and interpreted in the terms of so-called objective science. The interpretations of the ruins made by the Maya on the other hand and by archaeologists on the other have been incompatible for a long time. In this sense, modern archaeological interpretations did not affect indigenous attitudes toward Maya ruins.

Nevertheless, the application of structuralism, the development of landscape archaeology, the use of ethnographic and ethnohistorical information and the progress in the decipherment of the Maya writing allowed the archaeologist to study the past in terms of the ancient Maya. Attempts are being made to consider Maya traditional beliefs and concepts in current archaeological practice. Archaeological sites usually treated as sources of scientific data are now seen from the Indians' perspective. This point of view may be exemplified by the attitude of the authors of the book on Maya Cosmos.

In the recent years Linda Schele has shared her knowledge of the hieroglyphic writing with the Maya people [Schele, Freidel 1990: 401-403]. From 1987 onwards Linda Schele has organized a number of workshops in different locations in Central America to teach the Maya about the Maya hieroglyphic writing.

Thanks to her efforts the Maya started to read ancient inscriptions in their own language. In this moment the history of ancient ruins became unlocked and the modern Maya could enter the world of their history in a quite different way. Obviously this will challenge their traditional attitudes to the ruins and may affect their feelings of identity.

In the same vein David Freidel shares his knowledge of the ancient Maya with the modern Maya people. For example in *Maya Cosmos* [Freidel et al. 1993: 386-391] Freidel narrates how he took the Maya from the village of Yaxuna to show them the archaeological site of Chichén Itzá. In the Ballcourt Friedel told the Maya its ancient name, as deciphered from the ancient writings and started to narrate the Classic story of the creation. In another place he taught them the Chichén Itzá history and the Maya shared their knowledge of Chichén Itzá history with him. This cooperative relationship becomes a standard in Mesoamerican archaeology. Archaeologists should consult indigenous ethnic groups about the locations and meanings of their cultural sites [Winter 1980: 127]. However, it should be stressed that Freidel challenged the Maya interpretations of the past. Therefore, it is essential to realize that archaeological actions will have an effect upon indigenous beliefs and heritage.

Both authors are convinced that shamanism has been a universal belief system of native Americans. The authors also consider shamanism as a common base for the development panAmerican identity. According to the authors shamanism is „a vision that is the natural legacy of all the American peoples and that help us to unite them in purpose as we face the challenge of rethinking our relationship to the life system that spawned us all” [Freidel et al. 1993: 13]. To achieve their goals they even bring together

shamans from different Indian tribes to allow them to share their knowledge.

Both authors have been fascinated with shamanism and have created a book that narrates their personal encounter with shamanism through the Maya studies. It fits well with the New Age movement. This international parareligious movement which is particularly popular in the US emphasizes the importance of a spiritual experience. In today's America shamanism has become one of the most popular ways to find this spiritual encounter and this fact may lead to some conflict situations. For example, Indian and white Anglo-American shamans are competing for control of over Indian sacred places. New Ages practitioners may invade Indian sacred places in order to find a spiritual encounter [Deloria 1992: 598]. Indians are deprived of particular shapes of their shamanism because its more universal and accessible form is propagated by New Agers. While the authors of *Maya Cosmos* seem to see Maya shamanism as a part of an American heritage, the Maya consider it as a symbol of their particularity. The Maya claim their past because they use it to reinforce the distinction upon which the continuity of their ethnic group depends. Archaeologists claims over the past serve to establish a common base for a pan-American identity.

CONCLUSIONS

At this conference Mariusz Ziółkowski offered us an example of how Incaic symbols are manipulated by state agencies to recreate a common identity between different ethnic groups and societies on a state-level. State's glorification of the Incas serves to legitimate the bloodshed produced by military actions at the Ecuadorian-Peruvian border. Ziółkowski shows us how a modern Latin American state suppresses historic knowledge of a particular ethnic group and replaces it with a state ideology. Without any doubt, the state ideology exerts hegemony over ethnic traditions and archaeologically recreated past is interpreted in such a way that is useful in the service of the state.

Throughout this paper I have been concerned to show that archaeology should deal with indigenous populations in a more positive way. Fortunately, a growing awareness of the relationship between archaeology, national and global interests and indigenous populations is observed among the Americanists and Americanist archaeologists.

Archaeological evidence can now support the idea that the Narragansett actively resisted assimilation and maintained tribal identity. They accepted and even successfully reinterpreted some of the Western values to accommodate them to their own world views. Even they synthesized new ideas into their vision of the world. However, the Narragansett vision of themselves tends to present them as an ethnic group which resisted the European domination with a great success. A positive cooperation between Narragansett and archaeologists demonstrated new connections between historical events and basic structures of their models of themselves and produced an alternative image of the past.

El Pilar example shows us how archaeologists can produce a common set of symbols (ruins of the ancient Maya) and provide a framework for a communal identity. This model seems to work on a local level but when more general models on a pan-Central American level are introduced they appear to fail to operate since they do rely on more abstract identities. Euroamerican model views Central America as a homogenous region and fails to reconstruct the past of different ethnic groups.

Third example demonstrates the possibility of manipulations with the past. A myth of a common pan American shamanism does not necessarily lead to the development of a pan-American native American consciousness. Modern New Agers are willing to view shamanism as an universal religion that bring man back to the world of nature.

Archaeology not only recovers the past but also interprets it. The strength of archaeology lies in fact that it creates „objective” and „scientific” stories about Pre-Columbian past. This awareness is extremely important here because the results of archaeological investigation serve to „legitimate the whole range of cultural aspirations and political and economic agendas [Wylie 1992: 592]. It is a moral and ethic obligation of archaeologists to counter popular beliefs in native societies as static and unprogressive in prehistoric times on the one hand and to unmask the colonialist mentality operative in American and Latin American archaeology on the other.

Recent developments in the field of Americanist archaeology clearly demonstrate that the dialogue between archaeologists and Indians is possible. The Native American Scholarship Fund (sponsored by the Society for American Archaeology) designed to teach American Indians in the field of American archaeology [Thomas 1992] and the participation of the Maya in *Congresos Internacionales de Mayistas* who share knowledge with anthropologists are positive signs in this direction. In this way archaeology may regain its reputation among native peoples who may still believe that it removes them from their own past simple because archaeology treats the ruins as the heritage of all of the citizens.

Polish school of nationalist archaeology is widely known in the world. Along with the science of history, Polish archaeology created the myth of Polish homogeneity reducing the variety of ethnic conflicts to the Polish-German [Lowenthal 1994: 307] or Slavic-Germanic animosity. However, current Polish archaeology should offer new reinterpretations of the past giving place to national minorities who have the right to offer their own interpretations and to present their own heritage. Blank areas do really exist in the official Polish archaeology. These new interpretations should be assimilated within the main body of Polish archaeology. In my opinion the existence of a number of interpretations of the past, including minority viewpoints, is much more positive for archaeology than the traditional consensus.

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