World Archaeological Congress 4

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Symposium: Overlooking Things Small and Large in the Rush to Global Inference

Abstract Package

Convenors:
Mary C. Beaudry and James Symonds

We seek to explore the interplay between local and global contexts and scales of analysis in the archaeology of comparative colonialism. It is a simple matter to see the imprint of colonialism if one begins from the perspective of the colonial/imperial power: first there are broad, cross-cutting patterns of colonial expansion; second, different nations had distinct and distinctive approaches to colonization to the extent that some, like the Dutch East India Company/Dutch West India Company, literally had "kits" for colonizing that resulted in an unmistakable material signature around the globe. Neither of the above alter the fact that "the colonial experience" differed from one place to another. And this last is the most interesting part of the story even if it is far more difficult to tease out. Our point is that local scale provides the necessary context(s) for global inferences and that de-contextualized global inferences are not particularly useful and may gloss important cultural information.

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Timewarps and the Archaeological Interpretation of a Georgia Rice Plantation

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Historical archaeology is a strong bridge to the past, although it is fragmentary in its material evidence, and episodic in its chronology (i.e., it does not flow continuously--in fact the "breaks" and discrete dates of deposits are what allow an archaeologist to study change over time). Historical archaeology is also tightly tied to place. For this reason, Rhys Isaacs writes of it as a topological inquiry. Archaeologists start from a single site and work outwards rather than using an event or an idea as a beginning point, although those who produce the richest interpretations know well the relevant history and ethnography. The history and culture of a region, especially its mythic/folk history in turn impacts the archaeology.

In the paper that follows, the interpretation of the artifacts and context for a Georgia rice plantation are presented by working outwards from the artifacts to a functional analysis of activities on the plantation, and to a consideration of context, then and now. Anthropological theory, especially as applied by Marshall Sahlins to historical events, is used to show how participants in dual social universes may have perceived the historical events that took place at the plantation and how understanding the circumstances of the plantation's destruction during the Civil War takes one into a hiatus—an era when time and history almost stand still. What one encounters, this writer suggests, is a timewarp which still influences the history of the region—one rooted in a mythic reality conveyed in local texts.

Diaspora and identity: 'becoming worlds' and nineteenth-century emigration from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland to Nova Scotia

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This paper will explore how social identity is constructed at various levels from the local to the global, drawing upon recent historical archaeology in South Uist, and Nova Scotia. Consideration will be given to the way in which individual and community identity is invented and re-created by island communities in marginal farming environments. What impact did the introduction of agrarian capitalism have upon daily-routines and perceptions of local identity in the Outer Hebrides? How were constructions of selfhood and community modified and codified by nineteenth century formulations of national identity from the industrialised Scottish lowlands? To conclude I will consider aspects of the cognitive-rift caused by the Highland diaspora. How were elements of Scottish identity retained and re-invented by farmers of Hebridean descent in the countryside of Nova Scotia?

THE OLD KINCHEGA HOMESTEAD

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The Kinchega pastoral estate, in the west Darling area in western N.S.W. (Australia), now the Kinchega National Park, is one of the earliest pastoral stations in the area. It was first settled by Europeans in the 1850s. The Old Kinchega homestead was built in the 1880s and abandoned in the 1950s when the nearby lake systems were artificially flooded. The work of the Kinchega Archaeological Research Project includes a detailed study of the archaeology and documentary and oral records of the homestead area and its occupants for an investigation of the material culture of households in rural colonial Australia. This material will be used particularly to study the spatial and gender divisions of household activities in a colonial context, as well as cultural relationships between the indigenous population and settler, and between Anglo-Celtic and non-Anglo-Celtic settlers. This paper reports on the first two field campaigns which have been concerned with survey and with assessing excavation potential, in light of the questions to be addressed. It also discusses the role of archaeological investigation in the study of domestic behaviour in 19th- and early 20th-century Australia.

An Historical Archaeology of the Sephardic Jewish Diaspora

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After their expulsion from Spain in 1492, Iberian Jews formed Diaspora communities in more tolerant locales. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these Sephardic Jews created communities on a number of English and Dutch islands in the Caribbean, as well as within the North American colonies. While these far-flung communities shared religious and ethnic ties, they found themselves living within varying cultural and political contexts. Therefore, although these communities formed in regions that provided an outlet for shared religious and ethnic observances, they each had to adapt to, and were therefore shaped by, their unique context. The historical archaeological exploration of a single Jewish community on a former British colony in the West Indies, and the comparison of aspects of that community with contemporary Sephardic communities within other political and geographical contexts, is used to illustrate this argument. In this period of global archaeology, this study indicates the need not only for an understanding of global influences, but also of local pressures, and how the two interrelate, in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the past.

Albion's Many Seeds: Transplanting British Regional Identities

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I address the transplantation British regional cultures using 17th-century Newbury, Massachusetts, as a case study. Settlers here were, in essence, commercial ranchers, and the local economy did not fit the stereotype of "family farms." Hence the early settlement patterns and material culture were very different from the old homestead/family farm model of English settlement in New England and elsewhere. Likewise the fisherfolk of coastal towns north of Boston often revealed their West Country origins through their material culture and lifestyles. The notion is that it is important to comprehend local contexts at both ends of the colonial experience in order best to understand the varieties of a global phenomenon. Of interest is the effect of British regional identity and subculture on colonial contexts and the proper scale at which to investigate this cultural phenomenon.

Materiality, modernity and the role of Historical Archaeology

Associate Professor Roland Fletcher

Once we recognise that the material component of human behaviour can have profound and deleterous effects on the conditions of social life the role of Historical Archaeology is placed in a new light.Though that materiality has impacted on community life throughout the evolution and development of our social behaviour we are now living in a period, conseqeunt on the Industrial revolution, in which that potential impact has reached an unprecedented magnitude. The material can now be produced rapidly in vast quantities but still possesses its attributes of inertia and the capacity to carry energy. We live in urban aggregates of extreme durability and industrialised weapons technology has had a profound impact on the consequences of conflict. The Industrial Revolution, while creating great wealth and improved living conditions, also generated a brutal and as yet unresolved context between materiality and theh active component of social life. One crucial role for Historical Archaeology is to assess the ancestry and that crisis and to assess the progress of the engagement. Whether we can judge its eventual outcome will depend upon our understanding of the degree to which social action is beginning to gain ascendancy.