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A THEORETICAL APPROACH FOR THE INTERPRETATION
OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

The aim of this article is to present a theoretical approach for the interpretation of material remains in archaeology. This theoretical approach takes into account Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens 1979;1984) and Ellen-Jane Pader's work *Symbolism and Mortuary Remains* (1982). Ideology is also considered as a vital component of social organization and action.

An Outline of the Theory of Structuration

Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (1979) appears to be useful in establishing a strong basis for the interpretation of material remains in archaeology. For developing his theory he reworks terms and concepts that are related to social interpretation in general, and his theory in particular.

Giddens (1979:53) disagrees with structuralism and functionalism, which give priority to the object over the subject, and to structure over action. Instead, he argues that the notions of structure and action "presuppose one another" with a dialectical relation between them. A fundamental theme of his theory is that "social theory must acknowledge, as it has not done previously, time-space interactions as essentially involved in all social existence... Social activity is always constituted in three intersecting moments of difference: temporally, paradigmatically... and spatially. All social practices are situated activities in each of these sences" (1979:54). "Action," for him, is "a continuous flow of conduct... a stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world" (1976:75). Regularized acts are conceived as "situated practices" which point to the major link between structural analysis and action theory. On the other hand, both intended and unintended consequences of conduct are conditions of action, and are therefore involved in social reproduction.

'Structure', 'system' and 'structuration' are, according to Giddens, necessary terms of social theory. The sychronic/diachronic dichotomy is actually unstable and inaccurate. Social structure includes two elements that are distinguished from one another: "the patterning of interaction... and the continuity of interaction in time" (1979:62). In this way, 'structure' is actually a "structuring property," and such properties bring together time and space in social systems. Structures exist as "an absent set of differences, temporally 'present' only in their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems." This implies the existence of the actors who know how to do things. Such knowledge, by being recursively mobilized, leads to the organization of social practices; it also implies the existence of capabilities which result in the production of such practices. Therefore, social systems are conceived as being patterned in both time and space, which are achieved through continuities of social reproduction. On the other hand, as mentioned above, structures exist in both time and space only in the moments of the constitution of social systems. By studying the depth of structures in terms of "the historical duration of practices they resursively organize, and the spatial 'breadth' of those practices," (their spread across the range of interactions) we can determine whether they are 'institutions' or not; those with the greatest depth are, in actuality, institutions (Giddens 1979:64-65). Rules, which can only be understood within the historical development of social totalities, are the media and outcome of the reproduction of social systems. As Giddens stresses, "rules and practices only exist in conjunction with one another."

A basic precondition in the theory of structuration is the rejection of the dichotomies of synchrony/diachrony or statics/dynamics, and the consideration of structure as both enabling and

constraining; it is necessary to examine how these two are interconnected. Structure, therefore, "is not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production... The most disruptive models of social change, like the most rigidly stable forms involve structuration" (Giddens 1979:70). The 'duality of structure' is an important notion that considers rules and resources as both drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction and reconstituted through such interactions. The 'duality of stucture' is the recursiveness of social life that is constituted in social practices; it means that stucture works as both medium and overcomer of the reproduction of practices. It is the medium that reproduces rules, but at the same time it is also modified. "Structure is thus the mode in which the relation between moment and totality expresses itself in social reproduction" (Giddens 1979:71), which involves a dialectic of presence and absence that ties together social action and the properties of the society.

The members of a society know the institutions that are produced and reproduced by it very well; this knowledge, which is not incidental, is necessary for the operation of the society. The members of the society (actors) are not mere cultural 'dopes' who do not understand the context and circumstances of their action; rather they understand both, as well as the societal system, very well. At the same time, the physical, social and temporal contexts of interaction are quite important. Context is actually an integral part of interaction. Giddens does not agree with Parsons and Althusser who exaggerate the impact of dominant ideologies and symbol systems upon those in subordinate classes (Abercrobie & Turner 1978). As Giddens states, "all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them" (1979:72). There are cases where members with subordinate positions in a society have more penetration of the conditions of social reproduction (ideological symbol systems) than those with dominant positions. The basic theorem, therefore, of the theory of structuration is that "every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member" (1979:5).

Structuration and Symbolism

In terms of signification, the rules are conceived as codes. Signs exist only through their production and reproduction of signification, which is a constitutive feature of communication itself. Signs do not have fixed or bounded properties, but signification "is linked recursively to the communication of meaning in interaction... [it] refers to structural features of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by actors in the form of interpretative schemes" (Giddens 1979:99). One of the implications of the notion of 'duality of structure' is a constant interaction between individual action and the theory of coding, which are related to the communicative aspect of signs. Since rules are both medium and the outcome of the reproduction of social systems, the members of a society interpret the codes through their action and reaction according to the situation-context and to individual predilection; codes are also based on a common knowledge (Pader 1982:11). On the other hand, codes, which embody multivalent traits, do not pre-exist in the generation of messages because the 'duality of structure' in interaction makes the messages themselves reconstruct the codes.

It is obvious, therefore, that the emphasis is taken off the end point (the sign) and placed upon the act for the formation of it; it is placed upon the rules that generate it. Signs, as well as the rules that generate them, are not static or unchangeable, but generative; they exist because people use and reuse them; they are culturally bound. They also exist only in relation to other things; signs are defined by difference, i.e. by what they are not. The number of fixed meanings of a sign is unlimited (Pader 1982:10-11).

Structuration is the process by which societies reproduce themselves, and re-interpet and represent their structuring principles. The motion of this process, which is actually interdependence between rule and practice, is spiral; it never returns to the place at which it starts. Since the

synchronic/diachronic dichotomy is not acceptable, approaches that focus on 'snap-shot' representations are considered to be misleading. "What is important is which aspects of the system are seen to change, or not, how they might change and to what degree. From this viewpoint of the larger context it is impossible to see how the sign could possibly be arbitrary, for it is an integral, recursive, interpretative and generative part of social life. It can never stand still or alone; it is formulated and reformulated by use in practice itself being intimately bound up with social action" (Pader 1982:12). Here we face the problem of accessibility. It can be solved if we interpret the sign not as a transparent reflection of reality, but as a version of it which needs interpretation (Hebdige 1979:118); Sperber 1974:34). Such interpretations make it necessary to examine not only the content, but also the form and context. Form and content can be separated neither in practice, nor in analysis. The type of data we deal with - e.g. settlement, burial, sanctuary etc. - will affect the analysis and interpretation.

An acceptable definition of a symbol is the one suggested by Ricoeur: a symbol is "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which can be apprehended only through the first" (1974:12-13). A symbol is neither merely equivalent to "representation," nor does it have rigid boundaries. It does not mean an arbitrary and conventionally fixed representation or relationship, because this implies a static system. On the other hand, the definition of a symbol must emphasize the generative structural aspect. Within the framework of structuration, the entire structure - not only the signs or rules - undergoes transformations that affect secondary meanings and in return are affected by them; this is done in practice through use and interpretation. The implications of this are quite important. As Pader stresses, "the symbolic order is not stationary; there are an infinite number of potential interpretative schemes. These will, however, be influenced by the specific situation and further constrained by the normative force of the prevalent structuring principles in effect" (Pader 1982:13). The "multiplicity of meaning to the equivocalness of being," as Ricoeur suggests, makes symbols have the potency to stimulate new meanings. Symbols, therefore, are characterized by metonymical and metaphorical properties which are important in social theory.

An important aspect of the interpretation of a symbol is the position of the subject. There is a problem with those symbolic representations related exclusively to the perspective of the subject; such views limit the potential number of meanings. The subject must be de-centered, and the sign must be viewed within its real-world and removed from the central focus point; we must not emphasize the form over the subject and content. On the other hand, both sign and subject have meaning only in difference: "The pure act of the cogito is empty, and remains to be mediated by the work of signs and the interpretation of those signs" (Ricoeur 1974:244). As for ideology, the position of the subject, according to Williamson, is quite important; the individual bridges "the gulf between the 'system of knowldge' and the actual, historical and social situation in which it functions. For it is individual people, real people, who are the connecting link here: they, we, clearly exist in time and space, in a changing world, but also provide the arena... for the ideological structure of ideas. This only exists in so far as it exists inside our heads" (1978:102).

Ideology

The structuring principles are legitimated by an ideology (Pearson 1982:100) which is a form of signification, where the signifier becomes the very presence of the signified concept (Barthes 1973:127-128). Ideology has also been conceived as a system of beliefs which objectifies the perceived world (Althusser 1977:252). Meaning and the structures that derive from it are manipulated ideologically in order to represent, misrepresent, or deny social reality. On the other hand, material culture is understood as part of human signification and communication, a non-verbal representation of ideas (Leach 1977:167).

It is actually "ideological aspects of symbol-systems" that exist (Giddens 1979:187). Ideologies are not types of symbol-systems, nor are they limited to modern politics, since any kind of system (of ideas) can be ideological. However, the term 'ideology' can be used only if we treat a symbol-system as an ideology, which means that we actually study it as an ideological phenomenon. An institutional examination of ideology indicates the way symbolic orders contribute towards the establishment of forms of domination in everyday life; its aim is to find the basic structural elements that bring sophistication and legitimation together in order to favor dominant interests. The ideological elements have both psychological and historical character (Giddens 1979:192). This discussion of ideology is equivalent to Geertz's, the only difference being that Geertz's considers ideology the same as Giddens' term 'symbol-system' (Geertz 1964). Whereas metonymy and metaphor (which generate multivalent levels of meaning) are considered by Geertz as characteristics of ideology, Giddens considers them characteristics of symbol-systems in general. The multivalence of symbol-systems is linked to both influence of tradition and social factors that interpret symbolic forms in different ways.

Social relations involve symbolism, which bounds symbolic and ideological forms together. The meaning of symbolic forms is deduced from the relational positioning and is restricted within the context of a determinate set of social relations (Shanks & Tilley 1982:132). Symbolic power, on the other hand, "is only exerted insofar as it is misrecognized. This means that symbolic power does not lie in 'symbol system' in the form of sillocutionary force' but that it is defined in and by a determinate relationship between those who exercise power and those who undergo it, i.e. in the very structure of the field within which belief is produced and reproduced" (Bourdieu 1979:83). The implication of this in terms of material culture is that the latter can act as a means of the fostering of this kind of misrecognition, where relations and contrasts can be taken into consideration for any interpretation. Material culture may be considered as the phenomenal form of ideology to which the form and context of the material remains are related.

There is a general agreement among social theorists that both ideology and symbolism misrepresent and mystify reality (Bloch 1975; Turner 1967; Williamson 1978). However, though signs may distort reality or make it manifest in different perspectives, the members of the society (actors) are not mere 'cultural dopes'; they do have knowledge of the underlying principles. Ideology, which is an important component of cultural reproduction, has also been considered 'timeless' and 'inevitable' (Barthes 1973:141-142). However, Williamson puts the whole issue in a different perspective: "A central part of ideology [is] the constant reproduction of ideas which are denied a historical beginning or end, which are used or referred to 'because' they 'already' exist in society, and continue to exist in society 'because' they are used and referred to; and which therefore take on the nature of a timeless synchronic structure, 'out of history', although this structure as a whole clearly does exist in history. It only seems 'timeless' i.e. inevitable, natural, from the inside; obviously an ideology can never admit that it 'begun' because this would remove its inevitability. Thus, although systems of knowledge do have a beginning and an ending at a place in historical developments, their internal workings must be purely structural and self-perpetuating not from any movement onwards, but from a process of translation and retranslation between systems" (1978:99). It is obvious that societies reproduce themselves through a process in which people organize, categorize and interpret their world through the process of 'naturalization'.

Ritual (such as mortuary ritual) is an important form of ideology. Bloch stresses the dissolution of time and the depersonalization of the individual as its main characteristics (1975; 1977). It reflects the repetitive processes of nature towards which the society is projected. Ritual, therefore, appears to be part of the natural order of things, and it is accepted as such by the members of the society. The ritual symbols (material symbols, dance, songs) manipulate social order and are structured by it; they identify social reality with the natural order of things. However, Sahlins observes that

the materiality of symbols in terms of similarities and dissimilarities plays a vital role in their relational use and patterning (1976).

The Main Points:

In summarizing the theory of structuration, the following points need to be emphasized:

(i) Social systems are patterned in both time and space; this is achieved through continuities of social reproduction. The historical duration and the spatial breadth of practices need to be studied. There is no synchronic/diachronic dichotomy when we study symbolic systems.

(ii) Signs and symbols are not arbitrary since they are appropriate within their context which, in reality, determines their meaning. They exist only through their production and reproduction by the members of the society, who have a deep knowldge about them.

(iii) Symbols are capable of stimulating new meanings. Signs and the rules that generate them are not static or unchangeable, but generative. The number of potential meanings is infinite; they are correlated to an infinite number of interpretative schemes.

(iv) Signs and symbols are defined by difference; they exist only in relation to other things. This is an additional point which shows that meaning depends on context.

(v) Symbols are not only means of communication, but they are also inextricably related to ideology. Therefore, both symbols and ideology can be understood through the process of naturalization, i.e. the way people organize, categorize and interpret their world.

(vi) We cannot separate form from content, because the latter can be apprehended through the former; form is not only a type, but also part of the communicative act.

Material Remains

Taking into consideration the principles of the theory of structuration, we can consider archaelogical items as having a variety of meanings; the appropriate meaning of a particular object depends on other associated items in particular, and its context in general. It is not the presence of a specific item which is significant, but the way in which that item is used. This is quite important in distinguishing social categories and relations. Archaeological material remains have symbolic function and not only communicate social categories, but also operate based on the structuring principles in effect. We deal with the 'duality of structure' on one hand, and the use, re-use, interpretation and reinterpretation of style in practice, on the other. Since the use of signs and symbols is not arbitrary, material remains that are found by archaeologists involve non-arbitrary signs that are related to a specific ideology, and therefore contribute towards the objectification of the structuring principles of the society. It is quite important to look not only at 'what' it is used, but also at 'how' and 'why;' distinct archaeological objects or features of such objects must be considered symbolically meaningful for the society that produced them.

The symbolic significance of material remains can be understood in terms of the world-views of the members of the society, as well as within their daily social interaction; knowledge about those items is also quite important for the interpretation and reinterpretation of such items (symbols). In this way social reality becomes objectified, since such material items manifest the 'duality of structure' concept in action, helping also the members of the society to communicate on both individual and societal levels. As a result of this, despite similarities in terms of technology or subsistence, archaeological objects can differ in terms of symbolic meaning. It is possible for an object to remain physically the same while its symbolic meaning changes, but "it is also not uncommon for changes in attitudes or actions to trigger changes in the material culture with the resultant styles being 'appropriate' objectifications within the 'new' context" (Pader 1982:26).

Material culture is inextricably related to ideology. As Pader suggests, "how things are arranged in space, within any particular type of situation, is as improtant as what is used, or, differently phrased, ... form and content are interdependent" (1982:27). For example, the orientation and location of objects within the space of a house is extremely significant. It is also true that material culture and roles of individuals are inseparable; there is an intimate connection between social relations and their objectification, which changes based on alterations of the categorization. For example, a Buddhist altar with religious items on it is changed to a table with prizes, photographs of heroes and relatives (Humphrey 1974:273-275). The structure in use, as well as the group identity are objectified by material culture. Pader, who is in agreement with Thompson (1949:77), states that "the history of a culture trait which just might be the key to understanding the trait's meaning within the present situation... [if] the use of a particular sign is not arbitrary but is appropriate for the situation in which it is used, and if there is a recursive relationship between the symbolic value of an object... and the structuring principles of society, then surely any alteration in its use can help us to understand the kind and degree of social change by questioning why it is that particular sign changed, and changed in a particular way" (1982:30).

It is true that recent archaeological research on material culture has viewed artifacts as residues of active social behavior. Material culture has been considered only as a means of communication and as the material form of the social system, trade networks, interactions etc. However, these studies pay no attention to the form of expression or to the possibility of different symbolic meanings; they rarely consider the important relationship between ideology and material remains (Pader 1982:30). Material culture patterning reflects the patterning of the society. On the other hand, the archaeologist's own ideology plays an important role in deciding what is important in excavation and how to interpret the empirical data. As Mark Leone suggests, "archaeology exists within our society's concepts of time and space, and all our findings take on meaning as a function of these vectors, not independently of them" (1978:25). And Pader adds: "... all aspects of our world view, all of our structuring principles and values, in seeming to be natural, timeless and universal have an effect on our interpretations of other societies... In much the same way that the consequences of native ideology have tended to be underestimated, so the consequences of native ideology as a constitutive element and a formation process have largely been superceded by the demographic, economic and ecological domains" (1982:31).

The effects of ideology, as well as the structuring principles and values of the society which produced the sets of material remains that we study, must be taken seriously into consideration. It is necessary for archaeologists to overcome the practice of imposing their own ideological beliefs or prejudices onto the rest of the world at different places and times. Again Leone describes the problem: "Our society makes it possible for an individual to immerse himself in an archaeological set that is supposed to make the past accessible and in which time is overcome, change halted and uncertainty resolved. That time cannot be overcome, halted, and uncertainty resolved is forgotten in the set where ideology is taken for reality and misrecognition for what is real. We as professional archaeologists have been particularly concerned in the last 15 years with proving such entry with ever greater accuracy, which is translated in the everyday world as greater believe-ability and authenticity, therefore making the dual world harder to pierce. Archaeologists believe in what they do and their fellow citizens do the same, and all operate inside ideology as a result" (1978:31).

The main principles of the above presented theoretical approach need to be considered in designing a methodological approach in archaeology, and in selecting the appropriate archaeological data.

The first principle is that social activity is constituted temporally and spatially; the temporal, social and physical contexts of interaction are very important. It is therefore important that the chronology of all the necessary archaeological data be established, so that inferences will be placed

on both synchronic and diachronic levels. Techniques that aim to provide absolute and relative chronologies of the artifacts in question must be employed. The spatial distribution of the artifacts is another significant area of inquiry. This aspect of archaeological research is also related to the importance of context in the above theoretical perspective.

One of the first steps in archaeological research is to determine the nature of the physical context in terms of space-use: burial, habitation, sanctuary, fortification etc. The first set of data to be utilized for this purpose consists of the architectural remains. It is important to determine whether the observed architectural elements define a site as cemetery, settlement, sanctuary or fortification. It is also important that these architectural elements be defined chronologically.

A next step in archaeological research is to consider the associated material within the already established space-use. Symbols, according to my theoretical perspective, exist in relation to other things. The nature, therefore, of such artifacts may constitute another important set of archaeological data. The character of the space under investigation, together with pottery, weapons, implements, jewelry and the other associated artifacts will provide vital information pertaining to social activity and the world-views of the members of a society. Their distribution within the entire space in question, and their relationship with one other will be explained as results of intentional behavior. The members of a society know how to do things because they know why they do them. The types of data mentioned above, therefore, will provide information about the ideology of the society that produced them. The physical space and the associated material will indicate the symbolic meaning of artifacts, which consequently will reveal the ideology of those individuals who had the knowledge of and the intention to use them.

Another principle of my theoretical perspective is that form and content cannot be separated. We can understand the content (symbolic meaning) through the form. In archaeology, this principle must be related to archaeological data on both macrolevel- and microlevel-bases. The macrolevel data refer to the form of the entire space-use (e.g. the burial form), where the role of ritual has to be considered as well; important characteristics of rituals affect the form (e.g. their conservatism and repetative character). On the other hand, a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the appearance and the style of artifacts is essential for understanding their form. Small details observed on artifacts on a regular basis are results of intentional behavior, and should therefore be significant in understanding the ideology and world views of social actors.

It is obvious from the discussion above that material culture and ideology are inextricably related. This relation makes ideology to affect and be affected by material culture. Material items which function as material symbols are not residues, nor are they arbitrary, since they are appropriate within their context: the archaeological context, therefore, whether it is burial, settlement, or sanctuary, as well as the associated materials, significantly affect the interpretation of material remains. The same item, found in different archaeological contexts, could have different meanings; the way an object is used is significant as well (Orphanides 1986). As for content and form, these cannot be separated because content can be understood through the form of which it is part. And, of course, as seen in the summary of the main points of the theory of structuration, space-use needs to be taken into consideration in any interpretation, since space-use is viable in categorizing the world.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Τα αρχαιολογικά αντικείμενα και η ιδεολογία μιας κοινωνίας συνδέονται άμεσα. Συνέπεια αυτής της σχέσης είναι το γεγονός ό,τι η ιδεολογία επηρεάζει αλλά και επηρεάζεται από τα πολιτιστικά υλικά αντικείμενα. Αυτά τα αντικείμενα, που λειτουργούν σαν υλικά σύμβολα, δεν είναι ούτε απλά απομεινάρια ενός πολιτισμού, ούτε έχουν αυθαίρετη σημασία, αλλά έχουν σημασία άμεσα συνδεδεμένη με άλλα συνυπάρχοντα αντικείμενα (context). Επομένως, η ερμηνεία αυτών των υλικών συμβόλων θα διαφέρει ανάλογα με το αν τα συνυπάρχοντα αντικείμενα έχουν ταφικό, θρησκευτικό, οικιστικό ή άλλο χαρακτήρα. Αρχαιολογικά αντικείμενα του ιδίου τύπου που βρίσκονται μαζί με διαφορετικού χαρακτήρα και χρήσης αντικείμενα μπορεί να έχουν διαφορετική σημασία. Όσον αφορά το περιεχόμενο και τη μορφή ενός αρχαιολογικού αντικειμένου, και τα δύο είναι αδιαχώριστα μια και το περιεχόμενο γίνεται κατανοητό μέσω της μορφής, της οποίας ουσιαστικά αποτελεί συστατικό μέρος. Τέλος, ο χώρος και η χρήση πρέπει πάντοτε να λαμβάνονται υπόψη σε κάθε ερμηνεία αρχαιολογικών αντικειμένων, γιατί και τα δύο είναι απαραίτητα στην κατανόηση και ταξινόμηση του κόσμου.

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