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1983

1983 Field or Factory? Concerning the Degradation of Archaeological Labor

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/robert_paynter/25/

THE SOCIO-POLITICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

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Research Reports Number 23
Department of Anthropology
University of Massachusetts
Amherst December 1983

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FIELD OR FACTORY?

CONCERNING THE DEGRADATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL LABOR

Robert Paynter

A number of authors have commented on the impacts of Cultural Resource Management on North American archaeology (e.g., Fitting 1978; Raab et al. 1980; Schiffer 1979). For instance, Cultural Resource Management fostered the development of new analytic methods and techniques, especially in the areas of settlement and survey data and site formation processes. Moreover, contract surveys often require investigations of unknown territories, with the result that CRM expanded our knowledge of the archaeological record. Granting these effects, I discuss how Cultural Resource Management and the growth of contract archaeology have and are changing the social relations of professional archaeology.

CRM has affected professionals and amateurs, though I concentrate solely on the professional community. Prior to the most recent round of CRM legislation, surveys and excavations were carried out within academic departments or institutions associated with museums and/or departments (e.g., Stephenson 1977). Field crews consisted of students, volunteers, and/or hired labor. Work was organized to produce results consistent with the prevailing standards of survey and excavation.

Contract archaeology brought a number of changes to this social organization. One was the introduction of private firms engaged in archaeological survey and excavation. Another was the increased importance of efficiency as a standard dictating the organization of the work. The importance of an efficient, rationally organized operation went from being desirable to being absolutely necessary in the competition for contracts. The rationalization of the archaeological workplace became a

means for all institutions to receive contracts and, for many institutions, the means for creating profit.

The following discussion investigates the "rationalization" of archaeological labor by setting it within the larger context of changing labor relations in the U.S. political economy. Some parallels are noted between work conducted in traditional workplaces -- shops, factories, and so on -- and work conducted in the archaeological workplace -- the field and the lab. These similarities and differences are interpreted with a model of the U.S. political economy that includes the place of archaeology in this system. These interpretations suggest systemic forces behind the rationalization of archaeological work as well as some tactics professionals might use to maintain control over the work of archaeology.

Archaeology as a production process

Understanding the rationalization of archaeological work requires setting archaeology within 20th century North American culture. While this large task certainly exceeds the present paper, a preliminary and distinctive line of analysis can be sketched.

My starting point is to analyze archaeology as a process of production. This tack is different from the ways in which Cultural Resource Management in particular, and archaeology more generally, are usually located in U.S. society. For instance, one familiar approach considers the analogies between archaeologists and other professionals, such as engineers or doctors, who provide services to clients (e.g., Fitting 1978; Raab et al. 1980). Another approach postulates the operation of a free market and then considers the effects of profit seeking on the conduct of archaeology (e.g., Keene and McDonald 1981; Lacy and Hasenstab 1983; McDonald 1976). Such approaches provide useful insights into how archaeology can be conducted in the future, and warn of pitfalls likely to be encountered. However, these approaches, as well as the production approach discussed below, all are incomplete models of archaeology and the U.S. The production approach is admittedly another partial approximation, though one that offers some new insights.

Within the division of labor in our society, archaeologists primarily produce ideology. The ideology concerns a number of topics, including why objects are found in the ground, what people did in the past, and how past behaviors were similar to, or different from, today's ways of life. The archaeological profession does not generally produce the capital objects of society (automobiles, ball bearings, etc.) or service activities (health care or janitorial work). Even though archaeological products may come in packages as diverse as living replicas and scholarly monographs, archaeology is concerned with creating ideology.

A distinctive characteristic of the archaeological production of ideas about the past is that it is intimately related to the recovery of objects from the ground -- that is, identifying, excavating, and studying artifacts and sites. We are interested in retrieving resources in an orderly fashion to best interpret them and more fully understand the past. Thus, as a sub-goal, archaeology produces objects from past cultures.

It is with regard to these objects, rather than ideology *per se*, that archaeological interests intersect other interests in our society. For instance, landowners, especially farmers, quite regularly produce objects from past cultures as by-products of their subsistence activities (e.g., Gero and Root 1979). Ethnic and/or nationalistic groups interested in establishing or rejecting claims of cultural continuity also lay claim to archaeological objects (Johnston n.d.; Miller 1980). Art dealers have long been interested in archaeological objects (e.g., Heath 1973).

Recent contenders for possession and control of archaeological objects include private entrepreneurs whose interests stem largely from Cultural Resource Management legislation, and among whom developers figure heavily. Developers' interests are that archaeological objects not obstruct their development plans. Finally, there are the planners who, at these times, are supposed to mediate competing interests over the production and consumption of archaeological objects.

These differing, and sometimes conflicting, interests in objects from past cultures pose the social problem of control of the objects. By control I mean, who certifies that these are, in fact, objects of past cultures? Who decides where they are likely to occur, and who suggests what should happen to them when they are threatened by modern activity? In the past, professional archaeologists had authority in these matters, if not always ultimate control. Cultural Resource Management legislation provided an institutional means to exercise this authority.

Having authority and exercising control over objects from past cultures is not necessarily destined to remain the prerogative of professional archaeologists. Control over the production/consumption of archaeological objects is a point where the interests of archaeologists and entrepreneurs converge. Who will exercise control, and what means will be employed to do this, can become potential issues of conflict.

Degradation of archaeological labor

The archaeological goal of producing objects shares some striking similarities and some fundamental differences with the developers' goal, which is also to produce objects. The similarities have led to some suggestions as to how to rationally produce archaeological objects; the differences limit the utility of those suggestions. Insight into control is gained by con-

sidering some of the similarities and differences in archaeological and capitalist production.

To further examine the parallels in these two instances of the production of objects, let us imagine a widget factory. The widget entrepreneurs run the factory to make a profit. They do this by making and selling widgets. Producing objects is a subgoal in their overall design, and is accomplished by bringing together money, people, technology, and natural resources. The result is widgets, objects. From the entrepreneurs' point of view, the job gets done because of their money and guidance.

When entrepreneurs find their designs constrained by CRM legislation, they find themselves having to pay for a new job as well -- archaeology. They are expected to provide the money to accomplish the work, but they are not expected to provide the guidance. This is all the more frustrating because they see archaeologists using their money to perform some very familiar tasks. That is, the archaeologists are also bringing together people and technology to transform natural resources and to produce objects.

In both contexts, the entrepreneurs want to get their dollars' worth. Not unreasonably, the similarities between archaeological and widget production suggest to the entrepreneurs that the tactics used successfully in the widget factory should also work for archaeology. Thus, organizational guidance is offered, either in the form of direct advice, or in the form of political support for innovations developed by archaeologists that reorganize, and rationalize, the work of archaeology.

What tactics are used by entrepreneurs to get their dollars' worth? One fundamental strategy that emerges from the new labor historians (e.g., Braverman 1974; Gutman 1976; Montgomery 1979; Rogers 1978) is that getting one's dollars' worth involves gaining control over the production process, and, in particular, over how labor is performed. This brings us to some of the major forces that have shaped American society over that last two centuries.

The basic problem confronting entrepreneurs in the 19th century was to transform the generalist craftsperson into a re-skilled laborer doing specialized tasks. For instance, in the late 19th century, F.W. Taylor analyzed the entrepreneur's problem as follows:

The working men in each of these trades have had their knowledge handed down to them by word of mouth.... This mass of rule-of-thumb or traditional knowledge may be said to be the principle asset or possession of every tradesman.... (the) foreman and superintendent-

ents (who comprise the management) know better than anyone else, that their own knowledge and personal skill falls short of the combined knowledge and dexterity of all workmen under them.... They recognize the task before them as that of inducing each workman to use his best endeavors, his hardest work, all his traditional knowledge, his skill, his ingenuity and his goodwill -- in a word, his initiative -- so as to yield the largest possible return to his employer (cited in Montgomery 1979:9).

David Montgomery (1979:9) notes that "Big Bill Haywood put the same point somewhat more pungently when he declared 'the manager's brains are under the workman's cap.'" Obviously, when the knowledge of how to do the task lies with the worker, the worker can control how production is carried out.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw numerous struggles between labor and management over the issue of control. Figuring prominently in management's tactics were a set of practices known as "scientific management" and advocated by the above-mentioned Taylor (e.g., Braverman 1974). "Scientific management" consists of dividing labor into myriad parts, creating a situation in which any single worker no longer understands the entire task. In fact, only management knows the overall task; and as a result managers, not master craftspersons, design the work, set the pace, and assign individuals tasks. Through scientific management, control passes from the worker to the management.

During the 20th century, scientific management became an increasingly important aspect of work (e.g., Braverman 1974; Gordon et al. 1981). It was institutionalized in personnel departments and in schools of business administration and engineering. It has been used in a variety of work situations, from Ford's early assembly lines to the recent rationalization of office work, with its work stations, word processors, and so on (Scientific American 1982). Alternatives to Taylor's scientific management -- procedures emphasizing cooperation rather than the division of labor -- have been developed or borrowed from elsewhere. However, the goal of these practices are the same: to give one person control over the activities of another, and, as a result, to increase the production of objects at a lower cost.

A number of authors in archaeology (e.g., Cunningham 1979; Schiffer 1979; Walka 1979) have advocated the adoption of scientific management to redesign archaeological work. They generally suggest that it would be useful to intensify the shift from the generalist archaeologist to the archaeologist who fits into one or another of a variety of pigeonholes in an intricate system of divided labor. This departs from

traditional ideas about how archaeology is best practiced and would have far-reaching implications: for archaeological training, for archaeological accreditation, for control over archaeological production.

Scientific management advocates greater efficiency in the pursuit of profit. This is accomplished by degrading labor and creating top-down control hierarchies, altogether a situation which is best given careful consideration before being applied to the practice of archaeology.

The traditional image of how archaeology is practiced emphasizes the importance of the generalist. Herskovits (1948, cited in Heizer 1959:xv) points out that archaeology is the branch of anthropology requiring the most disciplined, yet creative thinking: "No branch of anthropology requires more inference, or the weighing of imponderables; in short the exercise of the scientific imagination, than prehistory." Successful attainment of this creativity demands the discipline suggested by R.J.C. Atkinson:

The archaeologist needs both a broad and a scientific outlook; broad to understand his work not as a subject contained in itself, but as one aspect of the wider study of man; and scientific to realize clearly the purpose and limitations of his methods, and meaning and value of his evidence (1946, cited in Heizer 1959:xv).

Such traditional images of archaeologists as these suggest that practicing archaeology needs to be done with a generalist's sensitivities. Interestingly, this craft character of archaeology is also found in Joukowsky's recent description of field training:

One model excavation led by an imaginative field director had two people, a chief and an assistant, assigned to each position.... For one year, the chief and the assistant worked together, and in the following year, the assistant moved into the chief's position and another staff assistant was assigned to assist him. This procedure continued until everyone on the staff who had worked with the team for two seasons had assumed a responsible position. In this manner, the communication of methods and results, the inventory of the previous excavation season, the standardization of recording and approach were all achieved efficiently (Joukowsky 1980:27).

Traditionally, then, the exemplary archaeologist is a craftsman who commands a wide range of knowledge and is

familiar with the variety of raw materials and tools available for the production of archaeological objects. This breadth is necessitated by the variability encountered in the field, and, hence, the difficulty of standardizing procedures to extract information from the natural environment. Given the variable data and difficult interpretive problems, archaeology has been conducted on the premise that more aware practitioners are likely to produce better data.

The application of scientific management has been explicitly recommended as a solution to archaeology's serious management problems. Cunningham (1979:572), for instance, suggests that we need to improve our business practices to "promote efficiency in both funding and investigation and so help to increase the scientific achievement that can be gained under any set of circumstances." Walka (1979), in an accompanying article, outlines the kinds of solutions business theory may offer archaeology. From Schiffer (1979:9): "... the seemingly high costs of archaeological research have surprised archaeologists and not a few public and private agencies. As cost information and time-labor data accumulate, it will become possible to employ scientific management techniques in research planning and execution...."

Davis (1978:24) offers some specific suggestions for dealing with the problem that "the present fund of archaeological expertise is in short supply." His aim is to obtain "maximum output with minimum cost" (1978:25), which in part is brought about by "quantizing" the practices of archaeology so they can be rationalized. Tasks to be quantized include "trowelling, arbitrary levels, survey patterns... screening, shoveling... literature search, field observation, and controlled experiments" (ibid). Having this information would allow a director to organize a research project in a rational manner and to exercise control over the quality and pace of production.

An intricate top-down division of labor is spelled out in the handbook assembled by one contracting agency and distributed to its project archaeologists. Here, nine different job categories are defined such that contract writing, knowledge of legislative requirements, and field work planning and practice are exclusively assigned to three distinct categories. In other words, the standards for the work, the implementation of these standards, and the final report are all controlled by different positions in the organization, a division of labor at odds with more traditional images of archaeology.

Further evidence of the use of scientific management practices is found in the increasing homogeneity of research designs, field methods and report formats associated with archaeological contracts. Given the diversity of field situations and of materials encountered, this homogeneity is all the more striking. The contracting agency handbook mentioned above, for instance, suggests standard survey procedures to be used by employees,

followed by a brief discussion of alternative approaches: "There are alternatives to simple cookbook approaches" and alternatives are acceptable "providing they assist in predicting probability of site occurrence." Note that the desirability of alternatives does not arise from the particulars of a research situation, nor because old methods need to be retooled. Rather, there is less "tedium if innovative approaches are sought." Traditionally, field procedures would be justified in terms of the uniqueness of any field situation rather than in terms of worker control. Needless to say, greater homogeneity of field practices is expectable given the concern with worker control. Schiffer identifies another process related to control that leads to analytical homogeneity:

Sometimes these analyses are performed by marginally trained individuals carrying out in rote fashion the institutions' long established procedures, usually in outmoded facilities. This tends to perpetuate a largely morphological approach to typology and to discourage technical and conceptual innovations. In reviewing the body of reports from individual institutions I am struck by the homogeneity of analytical perspective. Inevitably, when contract deadlines are fast approaching, analyses suffer the most, especially as tried and true (if unilluminating) approaches are resorted to (Schiffer 1979:8).

Lacy and Hasenstab, in this volume, also point out the increasing homogeneity of reports over a ten-year period in their Massachusetts case study.

Organizing archaeology along the principles suggested by scientific management is resulting in divided labor and homogeneous procedure. By dividing labor, control over survey and excavation is transferred to the top of an organization, eliminating the need for several, short-supply, high-cost generalist archaeologists. By homogenizing procedure, contract writing is facilitated, and control is again shifted upwards. Since this form of archaeology, practiced by specialists rather than generalists, contrasts so strongly with more traditional archaeological roles, and since the parallels between archaeological and entrepreneurial production will lead entrepreneurs to support such a reorganization of archaeological labor, it seems important to ask of scientific management if attaining efficiency is worth the effects on archaeology. In weighing this question, it must be kept in mind that archaeology is not the production of objects alone, but, more importantly, is also the production of ideology.

Conclusion

A production approach in archaeology helps explain where ideas of the rationalization of archaeological practice are generated. Considering archaeology as a production process points to parallels

with other businesses and suggests the use of similar labor control practices. However, the analogy is limited.

Clearly, the social conditions surrounding contract work are more complex than has been suggested here. All contracting firms are not necessarily private, for-profit organizations. Nor do all private firms necessarily require every aspect of their concern to turn a profit. Models of tendencies associated with these modes of organization would help us understand the nature of the pressures they are likely to bring to bear on the practice of archaeology. In addition, the role of the state, as contractor, contractee, and regulator, needs more attention.

Archaeology produces objects to produce ideas. Business produces objects to make a profit. And because the analogy breaks down, there are some conclusions that are not justified. The appearance of scientific management techniques does not, by itself, indicate an adoption of a profit orientation or a deviation from the goal of producing meaningful information about the past. Some archaeological projects require unskilled, specialized labor. Some jobs are so large that they require the efforts of many people, all of whom cannot have the credentials of a generalist archaeologist. Deetz's survey of Somerville comes to mind, as does the use of backhoes operated by non-archaeologists in deep sampling and urban situations. In short, there is a time and place for rigorously divided labor. Organizational form alone is not indicative of an abandonment of the charge to produce credible ideas.

This does not mean that the appearance of scientific management practices should be ignored. The parallels between deskilled labor in the workplace and deskilled labor in the archaeological field should sound some warning bells. Deskilling is initiated in order to increase not only efficiency but also control. Thus, if an institution carrying out archaeological projects, be it private or public, continually uses the same personnel in the same slots, and in this way perpetuates non-generalist archaeologists, the issue of control arises in several areas. Who is responsible for deciding what is a resource? Who is deciding how it is to be produced? And who is deciding what is significant? With a deskilled labor force, these decisions are not being made by the person who is in primary contact with the dirt and with the objects, the field crew member or digger; and, if they are, the decisions may not be sufficiently informed.

Moreover, once an archaeological organization has been systematized to turn out reports efficiently, based on directives from the top, the organization is left with few internal checks on the top and/or its directives. Given the need to optimize report production, what is to keep the person in the top slot from being someone other than an archaeologist -- someone lacking in the general characteristics and sensitivities that Davis saw as being in short supply? In other words, adopting

scientific management procedures can be a two-edged sword; in creating institutions that centralize control of archaeological decisions, we must guard against losing this control.

How then to best maintain control over the production and consumption of archaeological resources? Two ways are well known, need little comment, and deserve support. First, as archaeology becomes more centralized, the large institutions conducting archaeological projects must be encouraged to maintain high standards. This includes producing high quality reports, and hiring and paying for highly qualified crew. Secondly, the planners administering the law need the intellectual and political support of the professional community in the effective enforcement of the goal of contributing to our knowledge about the past. Specifically, the professional community should incorporate data from resource management studies into regional research, refine state and regional plans, understand the diversity of interests that come to bear on archaeological objects, and give up the myopic view that archaeologists have the sole legitimate interest in these things.

A third tactic emerging from this discussion of social relations is the suggestion that we maintain the ideal that diggers can ultimately become generalists who understand and participate in a variety of productive functions. An educated crew may be difficult to manage, as they resist interpretations from the top, but in the long run they serve the best interests of archaeology. At the very least, they will be sensitive to the unexpected encounter in the field that is crucial for making interpretations. Not only should academic institutions continue to train generalists, but contracting institutions should be aware of the stultifying effects of intricate divisions of labor, and attempt to rotate labor or reorganize work responsibilities.

The choice of tactics will vary from situation to situation. A constant is that archaeologists will be misperceived as people charged solely with producing objects, and not perceived as the producers of ideology. This will lead entrepreneurs who mass produce similar objects for the mass market to support specialist archaeology and to misunderstand the necessity and role of flexibility. They will see flexibility in field practices and tentativeness in ideas about the past as softheadedness. Instead, flexibility, embodied in generalists, is necessary to produce diverse objects from very different contexts to understand the workings of cultures divergent from our own. To reach an understanding of the past, we need to maintain a fair amount of control over how archaeological resources are produced and consumed, and to remember that our ultimate goal is the production of knowledge, not objects.

Toward this end of maintaining our autonomy, C.Wright Mills offers some guidance, noting:

Increasingly, research is used, and social scientists are used, for bureaucratic and ideological purposes. This being so, as individuals and as professionals, students of man and society face such questions as: whether they are aware of the uses and values of their work, whether these may be subject to their own control, whether they want to seek to control them (1959:177).

The role of scientific management in the development of the U.S. political economy has been to change the control relations in traditional workplaces, effectively removing control from the producers. Given this history, the conflicting interests over archaeological objects, and the misunderstanding arising from the parallels between archaeological and non-archaeological work, I am wary of an over-zealous application of scientific management to the organization of archaeological work, and resist any rush to deskilling archaeological labor.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mike Blakey, Joan Gero and Dave Lacy for organizing the symposium, getting the papers out of us, and their comments on earlier versions of this paper. And to Martin Wobst for working on his paper.

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