

# Preface



*Modern Western history essentially begins with differentiation between the present and the past. In this way it is unlike tradition ... though it never succeeds in being entirely dissociated from this archaeology [i.e., tradition], maintaining with it a relation of indebtedness and rejection.*

MICHEL DE CERTEAU (1988, 2)

What is an archaeology of history and tradition? A title like this may lead to the expectation that this book is a study that employs archaeology only metaphorically such as that produced by French post-structuralists like Foucault and de Certeau. The archaeology here, however, is formed more so by an engagement with the material remains of the past recovered in excavation and analysis. I do not mean to challenge the effort of either post-structural or field archaeology in comparison, but contrast them here for the purpose of seeing the useful similarities that may allow their convergence to improve archaeological practice. This contrast shows that an archaeology of history and tradition is an archaeology that draws on post-structuralist themes to interpret the material record of the past (cf. Johnson 1996). In this preface I explore what it is about post-structuralist criticism and field excavation that allow such apparently unrelated pursuits to share terminology, and what archaeologists of any sort can learn from this overlapping interest. This discussion is followed by an introduction to the following study that illustrates this approach.

Field archaeologies vary from post-structural archaeologies because they seek to make sense of the material features of the archaeological record on their own terms. This means asking questions like: With what can we relate a given artifact or pattern in order to support a plausible explanation for its existence where we found it? The intellectual effort is to bridge the past, in terms of what happened, with the present, in terms of what was found. Archaeological science over the past century has been framed by debates over what are the best means for making these relations, but the basic pursuit has remained the same (see Trigger 1989). Post-structuralist archaeologies approach the past in a different way. While aspects of this work take on the character of material remains, the focus in post-structuralism is the process by which artifacts such as individual discipline (Foucault 1977) or modes of discourse (Foucault 1972) emerged. This work is more genealogical than field archaeology since, rather than an attempt to place in the past what is discovered now, it searches for the threads of connection between artifacts in the present (be they material, discursive, or both) and their particular pasts. This is genealogy because it explicitly seeks to know the histories that determine current conditions so as to understand the contingencies that have shaped the way things turned out.

Field archaeology does not actually lack this post-structuralist approach to the origins and histories of artifacts but has yet to make its conception of "formation processes" (*sesnu* Schiffer 1987) open to the sorts of contemporary social and cultural determinants such as power, bias, and relativism that post-structuralism dwells on. Instead, the production of the archaeological record is seen in field archaeology as an essentially natural process (even when cultural transforms are indicated) by which artifacts enter and leave the ground prior to the arrival of the archaeologist. I believe that by recognizing the shared interest in archaeology between post-structuralism and field archaeology, we can recognize the space within field archaeology that supports an exploration of the contemporary means of production involved in creating the archaeological record. This means knowing, for contemporary archaeological practice, how particular sociocultural forces that create archaeologies also determine knowledge of the archaeological record. This proposal requires that we consider contemporary archaeological sites in more than objective, ahistorical terms and recognize that these sites at some time became worthy of study and thus "archaeological" in the first place and that we can and should know why. As much as any other characteristic, these conditions of discovery determine what archaeological sites are and play a vital role in producing what the archaeological record can speak about. What is missing is a method that might allow this post-structuralist genealogy of archaeological sites to be incorporated into the field programs that undertake their analysis.

One effort within field archaeology that provides a guide for the elaboration of this approach is the writing of critical histories of archaeological practice (e.g., Conkey and Spector 1984; Leone 1985; Hodder 1986; Shanks and Tilley 1987; Trigger 1989; Patterson 1986, 1995; Shanks 1996; Kehoe 1999). Exploring how archaeology has worked in the past, these reviews and histories challenge archaeologists to evaluate their position in society and the academy and, in particular, their relationship to the contemporary processes of cultural production. Focusing on the power of authorship and the responsibility of writers to critically understand the perspectives they employ, this work has prompted a greater awareness of the influence of gender, class, and racial bias in archaeological interpretation and a more contextualized understanding of the existence of archaeology in the contemporary world.

A principle effort of these critical histories has been to set archaeology amidst the processes of cultural production through which living people come to know who they are. These histories highlight the impact of the stories, rituals, traditions, and ways of living on archaeology that allow people to share a means of knowing the world and find common meanings of experience. Archaeology is shown to be one way of writing these shared meanings into existence, and, when contemporary standards are applied to interpretations of the past, making the world we live in now seem normal, natural, the way it has always been, and beyond critique. Critical histories of archaeology urge and guide field archaeologists to recognize these influences and to write against them in their work.

The effort this book makes is to extend this effort to change field archaeology by examining whether we can write, in addition to histories of archaeology,

*archaeologies* of archaeology by focusing on how a critical approach may function in archaeological practice. To date, the critique of archaeology draws mostly from the knowledge that archaeology is a social practice that makes use of discursive norms that potentially undermine both the interpretation of the past and the significance of archaeology in the present. Yet, while some challenges to the practice of archaeological writing are emerging (e.g., Shanks 1996; Hodder 1999), few critics have selected the methods of archaeology as the focus of their investigations let alone as a route toward developing critiques.

I suggest we recognize the parallel identified by critical historians of archaeology between their observations of archaeological practice and what Eric Hobsbawm (1983a) has called the invention of tradition. Because traditions require social practice, Hobsbawm illustrates that we can observe both the origins and modifications of traditions by exploring and contextualizing their actualizations over time. He also suggests that we can gain from these studies not only an appreciation of the contingency of seemingly timeless practices, but insights into the structures of past social formations by examining why they created, sustained, and changed their traditions. What was it about certain ways of doing things that made them traditional when they were in fact quite arbitrary and novel, and why would (and how could) something so timeless change? What is relevant here is that traditions, as they refer to a past, materialize cultural formations and modes of knowledge in a very specific way that allows their expression to go without critique. Traditions support statements such as “because we have always done this, its doing is normal and must be useful and correct; because it survives from the past, this practice is not really ours, but something beyond our experience.” No one, that is, is responsible for traditions—at least no one who is around today.

In critical histories of archaeology, normal ways of doing and producing archaeological interpretations are exposed as invented traditions that allow archaeologists (mostly unwittingly) to reproduce contemporary social beliefs and assumptions without knowing it. The past derived in archaeology is implicated as a construct of the present. There is no reason that we cannot employ this same critical faculty in archaeological investigation to explore how the invention of tradition was a significant component of the past activities that created the archaeological records we investigate.

This book interprets artifacts of the archaeological record and the formation of the record itself as a component through which past traditions were made, changed, and replaced. The focus of the book is how material objects became meaningful through the invention of traditions that created and sustained particular ways of knowing the past that have accumulated in the present as a diversity of histories captured in the making of the archaeological record. In other words, this project explores in one location how the past existed and was culturally produced as “the past” in the past. What I show in this case study is that Annapolis, Maryland, has been constantly under material and discursive re-construction in relationship to its past, and that this effort has sought to minimize change (history) in favor of stability (tradition).

Even though much has materially changed in Annapolis—something that can be identified in the archaeological record by successive layers of sediments and the creation and re-location of features such by roads, paths, buildings, and gardens—these changes have been consistently incorporated into a discursive tradition of Annapolis as a historic place where the past survives unchanged.

While the subject matter of this book is not archaeologists, I believe this study may stand with other critical histories of archaeological practice. By exploring how the archaeological record consists of the contingent ways that the material world was manufactured for the sake of the past, this book sheds a relevant and critical light on archaeological production by illustrating how current archaeological practice can be conceived in historical perspective. In each of the stages of Annapolis considered here, including the present, the past was rewritten without the appearance of having been so as a way to insure that the past created was current and of use. As archaeologists we should take from this example that our own efforts are (at least potentially) similarly contingent as we attempt to maintain coherence with the past of our discipline and the public interests that guide how and what of the archaeological record we study. We must allow these varied pasts—disciplinary, artifactual, and local—to coexist with the new conceptions we create in our work. To adopt this perspective allows the essence of post-structural archaeology to work with field archaeology as we “re-member” (Bhabha 1994) today’s work with that of the past in such a way as to elucidate and consider the histories that produced the archaeologies we undertake.

## ANOTHER ARCHAEOLOGY IN ANNAPOLIS

To do this work I focus on multiple sequential examples of the cultural production of history in Annapolis, Maryland that exist now in the archaeological record. This book draws from my dissertation research undertaken as a student in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, nevertheless, the clearest site of my education came from the tradition of scholarship and engagement that is Archaeology in Annapolis. This long-term historical archaeological research project begun in 1981 by Dr. Mark Leone of the University of Maryland, College Park, has picked over the contents of the archaeological record of the small city of Annapolis, Maryland, in enormous detail. The basic problem under consideration here draws from threads found in previous work done by the project which I have been able to reweave into the fabric of my own research.

As I found my footing in Annapolis, I realized that from among the central foci of Archaeology in Annapolis there was a key site of inquiry that remained to be investigated. One of the great successes of the project had been a reflexive understanding of the presence of Archaeology in Annapolis in Annapolis. With Parker Potter, Paul Shackel, and Barbara Little, Leone sought to make archaeology into something in Annapolis rather than allowing it to be construed by residents and visitors on their own terms. The goal was to make

archaeology a critical voice that would challenge contemporary politics. The focus of this work was the narratives of the past in Annapolis and how these narratives work in the present, specifically how they help to maintain inequality and legitimize forms of domination.

This research took two primary angles. First, Leone and Potter undertook an ethnography of the use of history in Annapolis. Potter (1994) explored the practical existence of history in Annapolis from walking tours to the official institutions of historic preservation and research. He concluded that history-telling in Annapolis is based on three assumptions: First, that the historical value of Annapolis is believed inherent and thus does not need to be explained but only presented; second, that the focus of research should be on the Revolutionary War era, or Annapolis's "Golden Age"; and third, that the city's dominant historical narrative presents multiple, distinct parts having their own histories including the colonial city, the Naval Academy, Whites, Blacks, residents, and visitors. Leone and Potter sketched out archaeological research designs and site tours that challenged these assumptions by introducing them as problems to be considered and to be discussed in the public explanation of the archaeological record. The goal was to produce an archaeological presentation that not only spoke about the past but directly confronted perceptions of the past, leading visitors to question their own assumptions.

The second research angle of the Archaeology in Annapolis program being drawn on here is a consideration of the archaeological record of Annapolis as a record of the development of modern culture. Archaeological questions were framed with an understanding that the remains that would be recovered were not from a distant time or place, but fragments from the eras that gave birth to living culture. This has meant that the archaeology of Annapolis has been especially concerned with the development of the culture of capitalism. Drawing from ideas formulated by James Deetz, Karl Marx, Edward Thompson, Georg Lukacs, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, C. B. Macpherson, Louis Althusser, and W. E. B. DuBois, Archeology in Annapolis has sought to explore how capitalism emerged in Annapolis especially in terms of the production of the modern individual.

This research has focused to a great extent on the idea of discipline. To be successful, capitalism requires that those who work do so in an orderly and predictable manner that is ideally self-controlled. Modern individuals cannot be overly encumbered by a dependence on others but must recognize themselves as distinct. This becomes possible when individuals each police themselves rather than relying on the state or any other source of authority, and when they believe their own welfare is not reliant on that of others. In the long run this production of modern individuals is a cultural process that dismembers the modern from the ancient by creating the modern in the mold of an object that can be severed from its surroundings.

Archaeological research in Annapolis has focused on the production of these individuals through material culture. Using both the archeological record and probate inventories, Leone, Shackel, and Little (e.g., Leone and Shackel 1987; Shackel 1993; Little 1994) have shown the rise of "individualizing"

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