

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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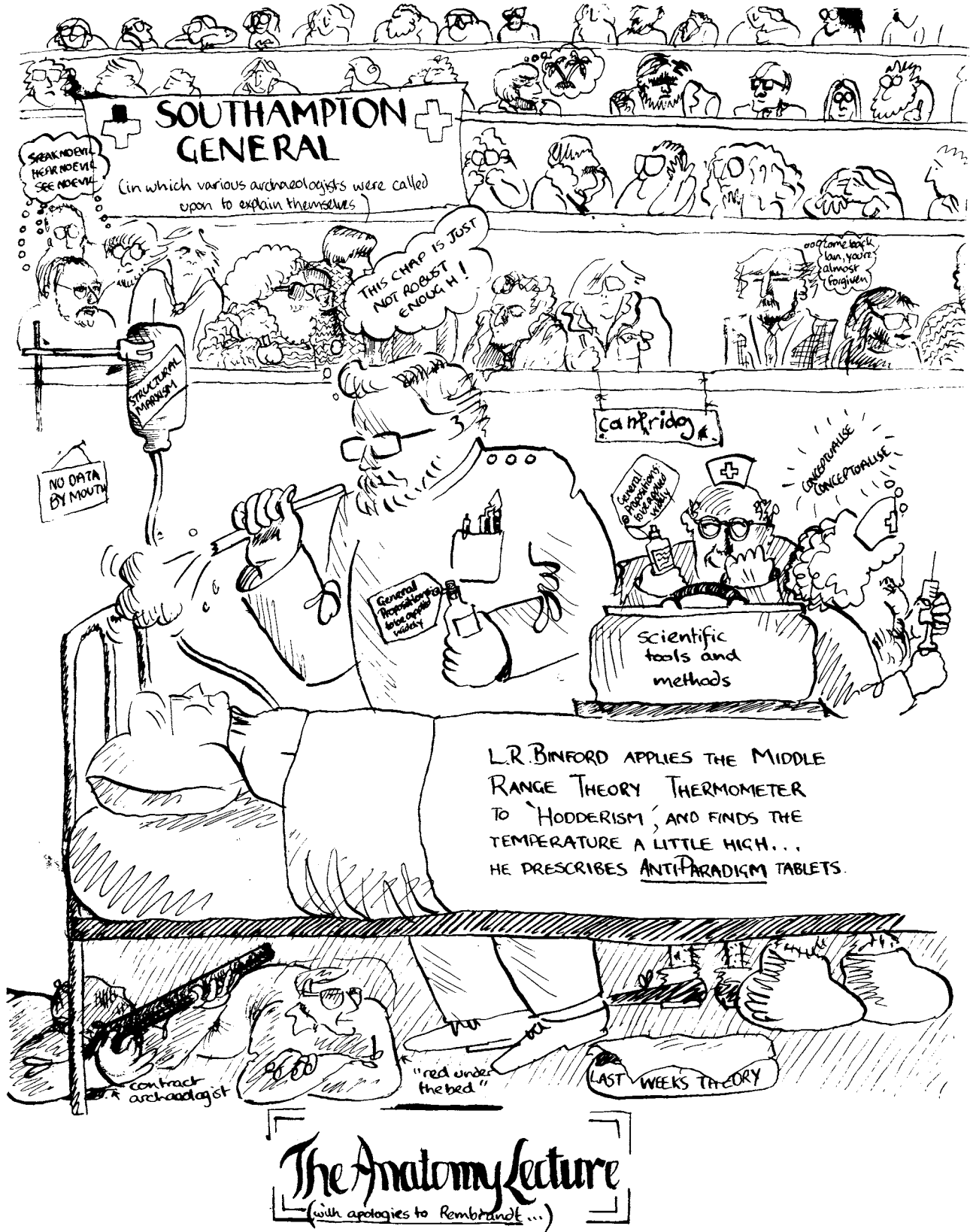
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SYMBOLIC
AND STRUCTURAL
ARCHAEOLOGY



**SYMBOLIC
AND STRUCTURAL
ARCHAEOLOGY**

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FOR THE CAMBRIDGE SEMINAR ON
SYMBOLIC AND STRUCTURAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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CAMBRIDGE SEMINAR ON
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PREFACE

The idea for this volume grew out of a series of graduate seminars in Cambridge in the academic year 1979–80. Preliminary drafts of a majority of the papers were presented at a conference entitled *Symbolism and Structuralism in Archaeology* in Cambridge in April 1980, organised by members of the seminar group. There has been considerable discussion within the group concerning the papers in this volume, which should be regarded as a joint editorial venture although, as will be noted in chapter 1, a wide range of often contrasting views is represented.

During the early period of exploration and development of ideas, premature conference presentations and individual seminars were given by various members of the Cambridge group in other archaeology departments in England and abroad. Individual scholars who were invited to talk to us in Cambridge in that period often felt, understandably, obliged to maintain a distinct opposition. While it is certainly the case that these presentations had occurred before our views had even begun to settle down, and that they were excessively aggressive, they played an important role in the process of enquiry and reformulation. In particular, the contrasts which were set up by us and by outside scholars allowed the views of the seminar group, and the differences of viewpoint within the group, to be clarified. The opposition highlighted our own opinions but also threw the spotlight on the blind alleys down which there was a

danger of straying. Our aggression resulted from the conviction that we were doing something new. This, too, was important. In the initial period there was a clear idea of what was wrong with existing approaches and there was a faith that something else could be done. But there may have been no clear idea of how the vague hopes could be converted into rigorous analyses. There was a phase in which there was more faith than evidence that the approach would succeed. Advances in the human sciences must often go through similar phases and I find it difficult to see how progress can be made in archaeology at the moment without the willingness of individuals to make a 'jump' and be criticised for it. It is the sense and excitement of newness which provide the energy to continue through this early stage.

Similar phases can be identified in other self-styled advances in recent archaeology, such as the Palaeoeconomy school or the New Archaeology generally. But the radical novelty of these and of our approach soon fades. It is now clear that the enquiry suggested in this volume is simply an asking of additional questions, extending both traditional and recent developments in prehistoric archaeology. It would be wrong to suggest that many answers have as yet been provided, or that all the problems have been clarified and understood. In particular, the archaeological applications in Part three of this book remain tentative and exploratory and I hope that the papers throughout this volume can be received

in the spirit of enquiry and doubt with which they were conceived.

A central problem concerns verification. It is suggested here that archaeology is a cultural science, and that all social strategies and adaptation must be understood as part of cultural, symbolically meaningful contexts. For example, burial, refuse deposition and ceramic variation are not simply behavioural reflections of adaptive strategies, functioning to allow information and energy flows. They are culturally and symbolically formed as part of, respectively, concepts of death, dirt and food preparation and consumption. Equally, observation, analysis and interpretation are themselves relative. Culture, the sociology of knowledge, and meaning are central problems and must not be swept aside in attempts to achieve an apparent rigour and the veneer of a natural science. If the cultural relativity of social actions and of observation of those actions is accepted, how can adequate verification of hypotheses be achieved? This question, occurring in the wake of the reaction against the absolute rigidity and assumed scientific objectivity of logical positivism, has not yet been answered in archaeology. The contribution is in bringing it to the forefront.

The early exploratory phase is not over. The debate which has been started, or revived, is introduced in the conflicting viewpoints in the papers in this volume. Several members of the seminar group reject functionalism, but they also reject structuralism. In reaction to Leone's commentary at the end of the book, the approach of the Cambridge seminar is neither materialist nor idealist. But there are unsolved problems in relation to both verification and meaning and symbolism. The degree of determinacy in sequences of social and cultural change is unclear. The nature of culture remains to be described adequately. These questions will be discussed further in future publications.

The conference on Symbolism and Structuralism in Archaeology was funded by grants from the British Council, Cambridge University Press, and the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge. Mark Leone contributed to the conference and kindly agreed to wade through and comment on the papers. My warm personal gratitude is extended to members of the seminar group and to participants in the conference for their patience, criticism and faith in the directions that we have taken.

April, 1981

Ian Hodder