

Memory and Material Culture

We take for granted the survival into the present of artefacts from the past. Indeed, the discipline of archaeology would be impossible without the survival of such artefacts. What is the implication of the durability or ephemerality of past material culture for the reproduction of societies in the past? In this book, Andrew Jones argues that the material world offers a vital framework for the formation of collective memory. He uses the topic of memory to critique the treatment of artefacts as symbols by interpretative archaeologists and artefacts as units of information (or memes) by behavioral archaeologists, instead arguing for a treatment of artefacts as forms of mnemonic trace that have an impact on the senses. Using detailed case studies from prehistoric Europe, he further argues that archaeologists can study the relationship between mnemonic traces in the form of networks of reference in artefactual and architectural forms.

Andrew Jones is a lecturer in archaeology at the University of Southampton. He is the author of *Archaeological Theory and Scientific Practice* and editor of *Coloring the Past*.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-54551-8 - Memory and Material Culture
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■ **ANDREW JONES**

University of Southampton



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521837088

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First published 2007

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jones, Andrew, 1967–
Memory and material culture: tracing the past in prehistoric Europe / Andrew Jones.
p. cm. – (Topics in contemporary archaeology)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-83708-8 (hardback) –
ISBN 978-0-521-54551-8 (pbk.)
1. Prehistoric peoples – Europe. 2. Material culture – Europe. 3. Antiquities, Prehistoric – Europe. 4. Europe – Antiquities. I. Title. II. Series.
GN803.J66 2007
936 – dc22 2007006469

ISBN 978-0-521-83708-8 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-54551-8 paperback

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To Hannah and Steph

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Preface

Coincidentally while writing this book I suffered a stroke that affected my memory. Fortunately, it mainly affected my bodily memory, specifically my ability to walk, rather than my cognitive memory. I have therefore had first-hand experience of one of the very subjects I was writing about. It took around three months to recover from the physical effects of this experience, most of which time was spent lying in bed reading detective novels and watching film noir classics. I regard this time spent reading and watching films as probably the most important period of research. This is because it gave me time to think and reflect on the then partially written manuscript. We live in an age of speed. The current value system that most British academics labour under subscribes to a belief in targets and accountability. Coupled with this, academic institutions are overburdened with the British disease of overwork, bureaucracy, and the audit culture (for a useful insight on this, see Madeline Bunting's excellent book *Willing Slaves*, Harper Perennial, 2005). There are times at which we seem to

PREFACE

drown under evaluation forms. Research time has become a little like the proverbial candle burnt at both ends and is squeezed into the last remaining moments of the working week (evenings and weekends). As such, research is conducted with no time for pause and reflection.

I regard my illness as a physiological response to the psychological stresses of this value system. As such I have come to believe that we need more time to allow ideas to develop and less for research-for-the-sake-of-fulfilling-targets. I have become a keen advocate of the Slow Movement, which takes time to savour life rather than treating it as a perpetual contest or race to the next staging post. For this reason I am very grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, who partially funded my sabbatical time, which allowed me time for this reflection.

The finished book is therefore a result of this period of reflection, and the book comprises a distillation and reworking of some of the themes and ideas on memory that I have been developing over the past five years or so. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 are all new. Chapter 7 was previously published as ‘Drawn from Memory: The Archaeology of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Archaeology in Earlier Bronze Age Britain and the Present’ in *World Archaeology* 33 (2), pp 334–56, under the editorship of Chris Gosden. It has been reworked for publication here. A fragment of Chapter 8 was published as ‘By Way of Illustration: Art, Memory and Materiality in the Irish Sea Region and beyond’, pp 202–13, in the volume edited by Vicki Cummings and Chris Fowler entitled *The Neolithic of the Irish Sea: Materiality and Traditions of Practice*, published by Oxbow Books. A fragment of Chapter 9 comes from the proceedings of a conference to honour the retirement of Professor Barbara Bender held in UCL, in March 2005, and published in the *Journal of Material Culture* 11 (1/2) under the editorship of Chris Tilley. Both of the relevant fragments from these chapters have been substantially reworked for publication here. Chapter 4 comprises a total revision of ideas related to material culture and personhood in the European Neolithic, an earlier version of which was published in the *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5 (2) as ‘Lives in Fragments?: Personhood and the European Neolithic.’

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A huge number of people contributed help and comments over the occasionally difficult period of writing this book. For helpful comments on the manuscript I thank Barbara Bender, Richard Bradley, and Joshua Pollard. I especially thank Katina Lillios and Alasdair Whittle for their services in correcting my wayward thinking. I am also grateful to Dan Hicks for many stimulating discussions about the subject from a different disciplinary perspective. Chapter 9 was written after hearing a characteristically mind-blowing seminar by Tim Ingold in Bristol on the 12 December 2005. This helped me reorganise my thoughts considerably.

For general comments of support during the writing of this book I thank Barbara Bender, Richard Bradley, Thomas Dowson, Davina Freedman, Gavin MacGregor, Colin Richards, Mike Parker-Pearson, Fay Stevens, Aaron Watson, and Howard Williams.

The illustrations were carried out with characteristic professionalism by Aaron Watson. I am grateful to Knut Helskog for providing the illustrations of Norwegian and Russian rock art in Chapter 9. I am also especially grateful to Brian Graham, who supplied the cover illustration. Brian was especially enthusiastic about the project. Brian's work is explicitly archaeological and evocative of memory. The reasons for using Brian's cover image is well expressed by the text (written by Clive Gamble) to his most recent exhibition at the Hart Gallery, Islington: 'Applying pigment provides many references to the accretion of time and his canvases are themselves active landscapes. As a result there is a sense of experience being laid down and continually being up-dated, rather as personality and a sense of self, who we are, are described as a process of sedimentation during life. And in those sediments memory is also contained'.

Finally, two people helped to keep me alive during the writing of this book. My wonderful partner, Hannah Sackett, and the best friend and colleague anyone could ask for, Stephanie Moser. This book is dedicated to both of them.