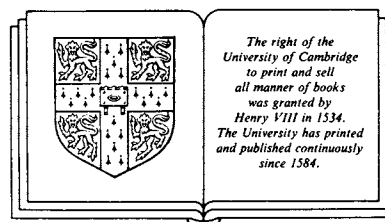


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SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE**

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PREFACE

Archaeology is still not very good at dealing with two themes which are increasingly seen as central to an understanding of human societies and of change in them: style, and communication. Indeed, it is a measure of our failure to analyse them successfully that they are generally regarded as separate subjects and treated in very different ways. 'Style in civilisation' is an old topic, with an extensive literature, but one which is unsteadily sustained by the hidden assumptions of various disparate schools of thought and indurated with the common sense of earlier ages. Style is often seen as something personal, to be judged on a subjective basis, a topic which the more robust spirits of the archaeological community often avoid. Communication, on the other hand, associates readily in the mind with information theory and with aspects of efficiency in very large systems: these are matters susceptible to precise measurement, and often avoided by those who seek sensitively to intuit meaning from the relics of earlier days.

In reality, however, these are two sides of the same coin. Style is invariably an aspect of expression: without communication between individuals there can be no style, in whatever field. At the same time, communication has to occur, if it is to take place at all, through a channel, in a medium. In the case of communication between humans (rather than, for instance between machines linked electronically), that channel involves one or more of the

senses. Style is an indispensable component of the communication system, along with the messages themselves. Just as there can be no style without communication, so communication when it occurs also generates or utilises style.

There are issues here which are crucial to archaeology: they underlie most of the discussions in this volume. For the subject matter is communication, and the effects of communication between nearby communities. What are the nature of the interactions between them, and the consequences of these interactions? On what scale do they operate?

These questions are of course not new to archaeology. On the contrary, they represent some of the first which archaeologists set out to tackle. In the early days, research was undertaken with almost automatic recourse to theories of invasion and migration. It was then pursued for many decades under the general rubric of the 'diffusion of culture'. More recently, it has been conducted with greater emphasis upon autonomy and on local innovation. But although these were among the first interpretive problems tackled by anthropologists and archaeologists, they have not been satisfactorily resolved. Indeed, so familiar have they become that it is difficult to take up any major issue in archaeology or prehistory without soon becoming ensnared in their ramifications.

The papers in this volume present what we feel is a

Preface

radical new initiative to break out of some of the constraints of the traditional mould while avoiding the new, rather stereotyped reactions against it. Just as it is no longer enough to explain changes in the society and in the material culture within a specific area by vague reference to the 'diffusion' of ideas from another, so the alternative claim of autonomy is generally an insufficient response. In the same way, the simple assertion of the operation of a 'world system' is sometimes little more than a reiteration of the old diffusionist model, ill-concealed in a new jargon which has replaced 'focal centre' or 'hearth' (*foyer de civilisation*) with the new 'core', and 'barbarian fringe' with 'periphery'.

The framework presented here is a simple one and, as indicated in the first chapter, it is essentially a structure within which the discussion of various cases can conveniently be set. It is an approach, not a solution. It does, however, possess the important characteristic that it directs attention to such matters as style and communication in a systematic and structured way which allows the integration of these with other aspects of the culture system, thus forming a coherent view. It can do this without our claiming to know or understand the full content of the communication, without pretending that we can intuit the meaning of all the messages.

The underlying idea of peer polity interaction was developed first in the attempt to establish a convenient framework for discussing the early emergence of state societies within the Aegean. It became clear that while the diffusionists might emphasise the significance of 'influences' from outside the region, and while some theorists of state formation would instead concentrate entirely upon social and economic processes within a single territory or polity, both of these views were in fact missing some of the most important processes and interactions. These, occurring as they did between neighbouring societies, were being overlooked in many theoretical formulations. The question is thus largely one of scale, and it has to be hammered out using concrete cases of well-defined territorial extent.

It was with this aim in view that the theme was made the subject of a symposium at the 27th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, held at Minneapolis in April 1982. Most of the papers included here were first prepared in draft for that meeting.

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David Freidel was invited to contribute to this volume following his interventions in the symposium, and Anthony Snodgrass agreed to write a paper following later discussion, as did Richard Bradley and Robert Chapman. Henry T. Wright presented a paper to the symposium, 'Peer polity interaction in early Mesopotamia', which we would have liked to include here, and the two symposium discussants, David Grove and Antonio Gilman, also made interesting contributions; we would like to thank all three for the stimulus of their interest.

At the symposium we were very much impressed to see how far, in the analysis of processes of development in quite different areas, issues which were effectively variations on the same themes, arose again and again, although in very different guises. The discussion and the analysis was able to proceed at a genuinely cross-cultural level, yet without losing a clear focus upon, and a precise definition of, the specific features in each individual case. This applied as much to the papers discussing state formation (early Greece, Japan, the Maya, and Anglo-Saxon England) as to those considering interactions at what might be considered a less complex level (Hopewell, and three cases from European prehistory).

The common link in each instance is the emergence of influential symbolic systems, seen to operate over quite wide areas. These are viewed, however, within a processual context. They are not claimed as the 'essence' of the cultures or civilisations in question, as they might be in some idealist sense. They are accompanied in most cases by economic and social changes evidently of considerable importance. It is ultimately the link between these various spheres of activity which deserves to be explored, and which has hitherto largely escaped successful analysis. In our view it should not be necessary to make a choice between an approach favouring the symbolic and the stylistic on the one hand, and one favouring the material and the technological on the other. Both aspects are seen as acting and interacting within a specific social matrix. It is not enough, however, simply to assert that this is so; the essential is to investigate these relationships in specific cases. This is what the papers in this book set out to do; we believe that conclusions of wide and general interest emerge from the undertaking.

*Colin Renfrew
 John F. Cherry*