

Before the 1960s, archaeologists did not much concern themselves with “theory”: archaeology was an uncontroversial procedure for reconstructing the past. The rise of processual archaeology introduced a concern for explicit theory and methodology, linking the subject to generalizing anthropology as a model of scientific rigor. More recently, as part of the wave of post-modernism, post-processual archaeologists have controverted the scientific pretensions of the subject by situating it in the context of present-day political action.

This volume takes stock of the present position, mindful of the importance of archaeology as an academic subject and the growing scale of archaeological activity throughout the world. It asserts the real achievements of the subject in increasing understanding of the past. Without rejecting the insights of either traditional or more recent approaches, it considers critically the issues raised in current claims and controversies about what is appropriate theory for archaeology.

The volume looks first at the process of theory building in archaeology and at the sources of the ideas employed. The following studies examine questions such as the interplay between expectation and evidence in ideas of human origins; social role and material practice in the formation of the archaeological record; and how the rise of states should be conceptualized; other papers deal with the issues of ethnoarchaeology, visual symbols, and conflicting claims to ownership of the past. The message that emerges is that archaeologists should be equally wary of naive positivism in the guise of scientific procedure, and of speculation about the unrecorded intentions of prehistoric actors.

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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