

1 | The archaeology of contact in settler societies

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Introduction

Although archaeologists (particularly in North America, but to a lesser extent in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand) have for some time been interested in exploring the archaeology of European colonisation (see for example Allen 1969; Deagan 1983; Deetz 1963; Fitzhugh 1985), there is no doubt that the need to celebrate the quincentenary of the voyage of Christopher Columbus fostered a major reassessment of research in this field, and there have been numerous discussions of its impact (see for example Deagan 1998; Wylie 1992).

The three volumes in the series *Columbian Consequences* (D. Thomas, 1989, 1990, 1991), apart from documenting the richness and diversity of contact research being undertaken in the United States, were also intended to right what the editor felt to be a major wrong. For Thomas one of the most significant reasons for embarking on an archaeological exploration of the consequences of European colonisation in the United States was that the role of *Spanish* colonisers had been masked in narrative histories of colonisation, and of life on the frontier. By focusing the three volumes on the consequences of Spanish colonisation, Thomas (and the Society for American Archaeology which backed the project) believed that the dominant Anglocentric or Francocentric views of the European colonisation of the United States would be challenged and replaced. It was a signal achievement and remains so.

This editorial agendum reflects the scale and style of historical archaeology which has been undertaken in North America since the field began to expand rapidly (both inside and outside the universities) in the 1960s. During this time archaeologists, historians and ethnohistorians have charted the extraordinary variety and richness of indigenous American societies, and the equally diverse histories of their experiences of contact. As has often been observed, the European invasion and settlement of the Americas is one of the most significant passages of human history, leading to a fundamental reorganisation of the ecology of two continents and to the lives of their inhabitants (both indigenes and invaders). Documenting, understanding

and explaining these impacts in the Caribbean, the United States and Canada have been the primary focus of archaeologists, ethnohistorians and historians who have ranged across the 500 years of colonial history to encompass studies of contact, slavery, frontiers and nation-building that have become disciplinary landmarks of equal importance to *Columbian Consequences* (see for example Crosby 1986, 1994; Deagan 1991; Deetz 1991; Ferguson and Green 1983; Lightfoot 1995; Rogers 1990; Rogers and Wilson 1993; Trigger 1980, 1984).

North American research on historical archaeology in general, and contact archaeology in particular, is characterised by the scale of the enterprise (see for example Miller *et al.* 1996), and the diversity of histories produced, be they of diasporas or migrations or communities created from (among a host of alternatives) slave or free, creole and maroon populations (see for example Farnsworth 2001; Weik 1997). North American historical archaeology also exhibits a strong theoretical focus where practitioners have sought to understand change and variation in historical societies (and the consequences of interactions across boundaries and frontiers – both temporal and spatial) through concepts such as acculturation, dominance, resistance, ethnogenesis, gender, and frameworks broadly described as evolutionary theory and world systems theory (see especially the papers in Cusick 1998 and Rogers and Wilson 1993). Such diversities of problem, data and theory have also required archaeologists, ethnohistorians and historians to reflect on difficult issues arising from the integration of all this variety into coherent analysis. A focus on the methodology of history writing in contact contexts has also required archaeologists to think more clearly about the value of previously strongly drawn boundaries between history and prehistory (see for example Lightfoot 1995; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995) and of the structural relationships between diverse databases (see for example Wilson 1993). Last, but certainly by no means least, has been a long-standing interest in modelling the consequences for American indigenous populations of diseases brought by invaders (see especially Dunnell 1991; Hutchison and Mitchem 2001; Ramenofsky 1987, 1991; but see also Crosby 1994).

These studies have laid the foundations for the global exploration of the archaeology of European colonisation, in that North American approaches and concerns have strongly influenced the development of contact archaeology in South Africa (see for example Hall 1993; Jordan and Schrire 2002; Schrire 1991), Australia (see for example Allen 1969; Birmingham 1992; Murray 1993, Torrence and Clarke 2000a) and New Zealand (see for example Bedford, this volume). However, it is significant that archaeologists, unlike historians and geographers (see for example Crosby 1986, 1994; Daunton and Halpern 1999; Fieldhouse 1982, 1999), have not yet sought to develop

a global account of contact and its consequences. Notwithstanding this, it is worth noting that there has been some exploration of the value of case studies derived from analyses of modern colonialism as sources of analogical inference (or just as heuristic devices) for an archaeology of colonialism in the ancient world (see for example Deitler 1995, 1998; van Dommelen 2002). Of course a major topic of debate here is the usefulness of inferences drawn from modern times to understanding the colonial experiences of pre-capitalist societies.

Sketching a global archaeology of contact

The value of comparisons and inferences that might be drawn from generalisations raises important questions. For example, should the development of a global archaeological account of contact in the modern world require us to expand and contextualise this North American inheritance; if this is so, then should this be via the demonstration of differences between North America and other parts of the world, or should it be through a reflection about the applicability of the theories and perspectives that have thus far underwritten the field? Answering such questions is well beyond the scope of this book, as is a thoroughgoing reflection about theories and perspectives. None the less it is possible to create a broad-brush sketch of some of the issues that have come to dominate research in this field around the world, and to document variations in approach and purpose that reflect local contexts and practice.

Thus at this most basic level *The Archaeology of Contact in Settler Societies* presents some case studies (such as those by Turgeon and Capone) that are firmly within the tradition of North American research, others (such as those by Acheson and Delgado) that owe much to those perspectives, and still others drawn from South Africa, Australia and New Zealand that perhaps owe less to North America and more to a need to comprehend the colonial experience closer to home. However, the purpose of these case studies (apart from documenting variation) is to enhance understanding of diversity through comparison, to acknowledge that the foundation of colonial societies in the modern world (and their subsequent histories) allows us to compare and contrast within the overarching framework of the 'settler society', which I shall define below. Of course 'settler societies' (which are themselves highly diverse) are only one kind of colonial society created in the modern world, and it is not intended that the archaeology and history of all colonial and postcolonial social formations either can or should be written within this framework. None the less the virtues of comparison and contrast can be seen here too.

A framework of comparison

The many differences in the histories of colonies and colonisers are the product of readily understood processes and contexts, five of the more obvious interlocking variables of which are: the chronology of colonisation, the types of societies encountered by Europeans, the intentions of the colonisers and the responses of the colonised, the demographics of colonisation, and the chronology of independence and decolonisation. These are readily exemplified.

First European contacts with the indigenes of North America took place over 500 years ago, somewhat later in South Africa, and post-1788 in Australia. However, chronology is more than just the timing of colonisation, in that significant variations in the type and intensity of impact are related to the economic and political state of both indigenous societies and colonising powers. In this analysis the colonisations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries differed markedly from those undertaken (especially in Australia and in western North America) during the industrial revolution. Similarly the phase of Dutch colonisation of the Cape differed in important respects from that undertaken in the nineteenth century by the British in southern Africa.

The types of societies encountered by the colonists were crucially important in shaping both indigenous and invader responses at a local level. These varied considerably across the entire range of colonial contexts and interactions, for example in treaty-making, access to land and resources, resistance and its consequences, the impact of disease, the participation by indigenes in the colonial economy and military (whether free or forced), and the role of religion in indigenous and colonial societies. European colonists encountered a great diversity of social and cultural formations that were later to be synthesised (by Europeans) into the classical evolutionary hierarchies. Of course these were also to underwrite the structure of both local and global interpretations of humanity by anthropologists and archaeologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The intentions of the colonisers and the responses of the colonised were also crucial. Obviously these were influenced by the first two variables, but other factors such as the nature and extent of local raw materials for extraction and removal to Europe, the growing of plantation crops (such as cotton, sugar, coffee, tea), the strategic importance of the place (for example the Cape and the east coast of Australia), and the suitability of the place for settlement were important too. The primary purpose of many European colonies was purely economic – control over resources for export to the

metropolitan and over economies for the subsequent import of European goods to the colonies. 'Settler societies' or settler colonies combined this former purpose with that of very large-scale movements of populations from the metropolitan to the colony. Of course both the intentions of the colonisers and the responses of the colonised could (and frequently did) change over time, as the 500-year history of North America and the shorter colonial histories of the Cape and Australia testify.

The demographics of contact are also a major source of diversity, both within 'settler societies' and in other colonial social formations. These range from the massive population movements of free settlers associated with 'settler societies', through societies with large numbers of slaves (primarily sourced from Africa) who were eventually to be liberated, and on to the frequently catastrophic consequences of dispossession and disease for indigenous peoples. Major population shifts, be they of the African diaspora or of the various European diasporas, are a major source of diversity among settler societies, a factor that is particularly prominent in the Americas, where large creole communities have grown up.

The duration of colonisation is a significant outcome of the chronology of independence and decolonisation, and is a crucial source of differences in colonial histories. In Latin America, 'settler societies' that were founded on blended populations obtained independence from either Spain or Portugal in the nineteenth century. The United States achieved independence by force in the late eighteenth century, at a time when much of the North American continent was yet to be colonised. Australia was not to become independent from Britain until 1901. Outside the 'settler societies' the process of decolonisation in Asia, Africa and the Pacific, while not yet complete, occurred rapidly after the Second World War. These former colonies, especially in India and Algeria, have developed histories that have been highly influential in the construction of postcolonial discourse in literature, art, history, sociology and, of course, politics. Postcolonial discourse has also become important in describing and interpreting the consequences of contact and dispossession among indigenous groups in 'settler societies'.

Settler societies

I have made frequent reference to 'settler societies', but what are their primary characteristics and what are the strengths and weaknesses of this category as a framework for global comparisons between colonial societies? 'Settler societies' were most prominently, though certainly not exclusively, a creation of the British Empire, and are best understood as being the product

of a mass European immigration where people settled on land appropriated by conquest, treaty, or simple dispossession from indigenous groups. Settler societies, particularly in North America, Australia and New Zealand, are also characterised by a link between mass migration, major ecological change, the introduction of new diseases, and a catastrophic impact on the viability of indigenous populations (see for example Butlin 1993). In these lands of ‘demographic takeover’ (Crosby 1994) massive changes in land use strategies and the introduction of new diseases by settlers collectively pushed indigenous populations to the margins of viability, and frequently beyond (Crosby 1994; see also the contributions to Griffiths and Robin 1997; Russell 2001). British settler societies are also often described as sharing a common legal and parliamentary inheritance, and many other elements of British identity which, taken together, provided a framework of stability and resilience and became the basis of the nations they were to develop into over the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see for example Eddy and Schreuder 1988).

If a common characteristic of British ‘settler societies’ is the fundamental realignment of population to a developing numerical superiority of settlers over indigenes, then there are many other examples of European colonisation where this was not the case – especially in the case of Belgian, German, French, Italian and Portuguese colonies in Africa, in Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Latin America, and of course in European possessions in Asia. Many of these colonies were not true ‘settler societies’, in that they were colonies administered for European economic benefit by a small cadre of administrators and soldiers, but many were, and these came to an end as a result of imperial conflicts (for example, the demise of the German Empire in Africa), through wars of national liberation in the twentieth century, and of course in the great surge in European decolonisation through somewhat more peaceful means after the Second World War. Yet prior to decolonisation (and in the case of South Africa with the end of apartheid – in part a form of internal colonisation), white settlers were none the less able to function in much the same way as they could in colonies where numerical dominance assured political and cultural dominance because ‘they were able to gain a disproportionate amount of power, maintain a viable political constituency, and assert and defend their strength through explicitly racial institutions’ (Griffiths 1997: 9).

These variations in the form and structures of ‘settler societies’ (and in their colonial and postcolonial histories) underpin their value as a global framework of comparison and contrast. To my mind this value counterbalances the quite proper reservations that have been expressed during the twentieth century about the validity of the ‘settler society’ model

in developing an analysis of contact and its consequences. Historian Ian Tyrrell (2002: 169) has usefully surveyed the history of the model and found that it had gone out of fashion in the twentieth century, to be replaced by nationalism, especially by United States historians who have focused on the genesis of nation and of the republic rather than European colonial history of that country. Other historians have noted that in the past the 'settler society' model has not been sensitive to race, gender and indigenous resistance, but there is absolutely no reason why this must or should continue to be so now that it is more generally acknowledged that colonial societies are mixtures, ambiguous hybrids that are full of divergent lines of interest and interaction (see for example Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995). None the less Tyrrell is right to insist that if it is to be of much use to historians (and the same applies to historical archaeologists) then the 'settler society' model requires us to integrate our global comparisons with 'the analysis of the systemic relationships between the "new worlds" and the "old". These relationships were determined by the process of European, and particularly British, imperial expansion, and the economic relationships of trade and investment in developing global economy that accompanied that process' (2002: 170).

One final aspect of 'settler societies' needs to be touched on, and this has to do with the notion that 'demographic takeover' translated into the total domination of indigenous societies by those of the settlers. I have remarked that in colonial societies where 'demographic takeover' did not occur (for whatever reasons) domination was effected by control over economies, and institutions such as the courts, the police and the military. This colonial domination began to disappear during the process of decolonisation (whether through warfare or by more peaceful means). However, this was not to be the case in the lands of 'demographic takeover' until the 1970s, during which period 'settler societies' have been confronted with abundant evidence that the domination of indigenous societies, although seemingly total and complete, is not always so (see for example Thomas 1991, 1999). The histories of indigenous societies do not cease with colonisation, with independence or with the creation of new nations, and the realisation of this fact has far-reaching consequences for the nations descended from 'settler societies' ('settler nations'), which have begun to experience the impact of the survival and persistence of indigenous societies.

What will be the consequences for the practice of contact archaeology? The need for contact archaeologists to chart the histories of indigenous societies after contact has been recognised in North America for some time (see for example Deagan 1997). Ruhl and Hoffman (1997: 3) reviewing the history of contact studies observed:

Somewhat less attention has been directed to understanding the emergence of European-American colonial societies. These latter efforts have tended to concentrate on either the initial encounter or established colonial society, leaving much of the immediate post-contact period of adjustment ignored.

Of course Ruhl and Hoffman are right, but there is something more to it than documenting such important transformations. The impact of indigenous survival and persistence also means that explorations of historical archaeologists must have real consequences for the nature and structure of identity formation in these communities. But these explorations can also be taken further for the nations that have developed from 'settler societies', in that new indigenous histories will challenge and contextualise existing national historical narratives. All this goes to demonstrate the value of historical archaeology, both as a vehicle for acknowledging transformations in indigenous societies, and as part of a framework within which we can accept that the task before us is to provide a disciplinary environment where these new 'hidden' historical archaeologies of colonisation can be explored and written. Thus the historical archaeologies of indigenous societies do not cease with contact (or shortly thereafter). Rather they should be understood really to begin then and to continue up to the present, as they do for the colonial societies with which they share landscapes and experiences.

One of the major challenges this new agendum poses is in fact quite an old one for historical archaeology in that it has long been understood that the integration of highly diverse databases (spoken word, written word, observed behaviour, preserved behaviour) is a fundamental objective of the discipline. But the fact of survival and persistence makes this more challenging still. In these new historical archaeologies, issues related to a discussion of the relationships between history and the nation and between material culture and identity, and the notion of dissonant heritage (see Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996), provide three important focal points that connect the existing concerns of the historical archaeology of contact and its consequences with matters arising from the recognition of similarities and differences that might be revealed through comparison on a global scale.

History and the nation

That the histories of 'settler nations' and of the descendants of other colonial formations are likely to be complex and ambiguous, and that previous understandings deriving from imperial and colonial histories written by the European 'victors' will be challenged, has been well understood for some

time now, as a result of the work of Said, Spivak and Bhabha, among others. Similarly there has been a thoroughgoing reanalysis of the idea of nation, leading to their characterisation as 'imagined communities' that (by definition) might be (and are) reimagined (see for example Anderson 1982; Eley and Suny 1996). Archaeologists have also not been slow to recognise the implications of these new contexts of history writing, especially the notion that 'subaltern voices' exist and should be heard (see for example M. Hall 1999a) and that many alternative histories exist both in the centre as well as at the periphery (see for example Schmidt and Patterson 1996b). Indeed archaeology itself has become an object of analysis in these new histories (see especially Griffiths 1996) and this has also added a new interest in the history of archaeology, particularly in the links between archaeology and the creation of nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see for example the many national entries in the three volume *Encyclopedia of Archaeology: History and Discoveries*, 2001). None the less, the role to be played by historical archaeology in the building of new national histories that are both sensitive to the needs of indigenous communities, and capable of enhancing the understanding of others, is still unclear.

However, historical archaeologists working in the 'settler nations' are already playing a significant role in the process of reconciliation between indigenous societies and the nation. This frequently takes the form of investigations associated with making or sustaining claims to land, and of the maintenance or persistence of traditional culture, aspects of which are discussed by Harrison, Bedford and Murray in this volume. Both tasks require archaeologists to begin to describe the roles played by indigenous peoples (passively or actively, overtly or covertly) in the development of colonial nations, and to understand the roles surviving indigenous groups are playing in the development of new identities in the contemporary successors to such societies. These are far-reaching challenges, which have required archaeologists to build on the earlier work of Lightfoot (1995) and others about the ways in which the historical trajectories of indigenous societies can be described and understood (an issue at the heart of Williamson's contribution to this volume).

Material culture and the mechanics of colonisation and identity

If all social and historical analysis can or should involve the study of transformation, inquiry into colonialism cannot avoid doing so. Colonialism is not domination but the effort to produce relations of dominance, to produce social orders that have not previously existed. In many different modalities, it is oriented toward

incorporation, exploitation, assimilation and reform; however these operations are understood, they are transformative ones, ones that typically entail not only new forms of government and economic exchange but new perceptions of space and time, new habits and new modes of embodiment as well. (Thomas 2002: 182)

The analysis of material culture in contact situations has been of fundamental importance to the development of contact studies in historical archaeology. Here too the notion that domination is never total, and that cultural forms arise that can both subvert that domination and transform it into new forms of colonial culture, has been particularly influential (see Thomas 1991). Thomas' notion of 'entanglement' is a subtle but highly effective way of demonstrating that contact situations (and their aftermaths) are ambiguous and fluid, where the 'them' and the 'us' are transformed in complex and diverse ways. Archaeology is understood as a way of demonstrating the fact that the acquisition of exotic material culture by indigenous societies does not necessarily imply that indigenes were simply passive receptors, and that agency, control, and the capacity to make meanings lay only with the colonisers.

Many of the studies in *The Archaeology of Contact in Settler Societies* advance this agenda, revealing new evidence to underpin our understanding that 'demographic takeover' did not always entail the total cultural domination of indigenous societies. Turgeon and Capone, working from different perspectives, both explore significant elements of the contexts of production and consumption of material culture within economic systems ostensibly dominated, or at the very least seriously impacted upon, by European colonists. The related theme that social and cultural trajectories of indigenous societies are an important element in the formation of postcontact societies is well exemplified by Acheson and Delgado, Brink, Harrison and Bedford. At a more abstract level, Williamson and Murray consider the value that the idea of cultural persistence through transformation has in characterising these trajectories, and as an element in indigenous cultural revitalisation in contemporary 'settler nations'.

Documenting the many roles played by material culture helps us to understand the mechanics of colonisation and identity formation. Many of the contributors to *The Archaeology of Contact in Settler Societies* seek to integrate a diversity of data to create such documentation. For example Acheson and Delgado use ethnohistories and historical documents (including visual documents) to create their account of the contacts between the Haida and European maritime traders; Brink bases her discussion of San/Khoikhoi/Dutch interactions on a complex integration of