1 Bodies and boundaries

> They have cut the Gordian knot with a well-honed sword. The shaft is broken: on the left, they have put knowledge of things; on the right, power and human politics. Latour 1993: 3

This is a book about bodies as material and historical phenomena. Bodies intrigue us because they promise windows into the past that other archaeological finds cannot. They are literally the past personified. As the mortal remains of the very people who created and lived in the past, they bring us face to face with history. Above all, it is the *physicality* of the body that draws our interest. We instinctively recognise their bodies as we recognise our own; they are essentially *us*.

Attendant to this intuitive concern with identifying with the physical body runs an increasing public interest in what can be learnt from a body after its discovery, as illustrated by the success of the recent British television series *Meet the Ancestors*. Spindler's (1994) popular book *The Man in the Ice* proudly proclaims the account as 'a classic of scientific discovery, [which] shows us the fullest picture yet of Neolithic man, our ancestor'. A clear message emerges from these examples: bodies provide solid scientific information about the past. They are not simply morbid sensations or curiosities, but have real scientific value. The archaeologist is no longer either a romantic Indiana Jones figure or a boffin in an ivory tower, but a scientist in a white lab coat. The impression given of the archaeological study of the body is of an uncontroversial, objective, scientific enterprise.

Yet within archaeological circles, though the body is a defined space of discussion and analysis (Meskell 1998a), it is highly contested. The archaeological study of the body sits uneasily between two apparently conflicting, and continually developing, traditions within the discipline. On one hand lie the publicly visible science-based osteological approaches to studying the human body, grounded in an empirical tradition, with their concerns of sexing, ageing, diet, palaeopathology, genetic distance and metric studies of normal variation. On the other lie academically influential understandings of the body derived from social theory, in

particular sociology and anthropology, which increasingly view the body as a social construction. Osteological studies recognise and study variation between individual bodies but osteological conceptualisations of the body itself are necessarily fixed, universal and transhistorical in order that the body may be subject to scientific analysis and comparisons between bodies made. By contrast, those who identify the body as a social construction perceive it as fluid and culturally specific. At its most extreme, for them bodies are historically bound individuals whose very subjectivity precludes even the prospect of science as an appropriate methodology for study.

Debates and discussions on the relationship between biology and culture within social anthropology (e.g. Ingold 1990; Hinde 1991; Goldschmidt 1993; Toren 1993; Robertson 1996) have, so far, had little impact within archaeology. Despite recent attempts to describe human life-ways through the skeleton (e.g. Larsen 1997; Robb *et al*. 2001; Peterson 2002; Roberts and Cox 2003), in archaeology there often seems to be little relationship between the biological study of the human skeleton and socio-theoretical understandings of the body. While osteological determinations, particularly of age and sex, are regularly used as the basis for archaeological interpretation through the association between people and artefacts in mortuary contexts, there is no explicit framework for integrating osteoarchaeology within archaeological thought. Once sex or age has been determined, the body no longer seems of interest to the archaeologist. The physiological aspects of the body which form the foundation of osteological assessments are often silent in the process of interpretation as, in the search for social meaning, the emphasis shifts from the body to objects surrounding it. Archaeological practice tends to focus on artefacts surrounding bodies rather than on bodies themselves.

The skeletal body is employed as a means of underpinning interpretations rather than as a source for generating them. Even approaches which emphasise phenomenology and embodied experience, thereby involving the body as a locus for understanding, neglect to incorporate osteoarchaeological insights. Despite the physicality of the body, which naturally lends itself as a potential material resource, the skeletal body is rarely used explicitly for interpretation. Osteological research often remains distinct from more traditional material-culture-based interpretative approaches, notwithstanding the wide range of data that can be gained from the study of human remains that could potentially contribute to understanding social life and identity. This situation is somewhat inconsistent with the aims of archaeology given the potential of human remains for shedding light on past lives and the fact that those remains are the very people whose material expression archaeologists study. Archaeological attitudes

to the body create tension: archaeology relies on the skeletal body to create understandings, but archaeological interpretations seem to float free of it. Despite some concern that it has been difficult to locate and identify 'real people' and relate them to the archaeological record (Johnson 1989; Tringham 1991; Meskell 1998b), skeletons are such 'real people'. Indeed, identifying them as people and identifying with the past through them is perhaps the attraction of osteoarchaeology. There is nothing more real and concrete than human remains and by forming an integral part of the archaeological record they remind us in a very real way about our own mortality.

The allocation of the body

A key problem in archaeological approaches to the body is that, while we need to recognise the body as a material entity in order to do archaeology, within the discipline archaeology has constructed divisive, seemingly impermeable boundaries that allocate and predetermine interpretative responsibility. Tension between osteoarchaeology and material-culture-based archaeology is not an inevitable product of the material on which different kinds of archaeologists base their analyses, in this case human bones or cultural artefacts. It represents a deep rift within the discipline which can be characterised in terms of historically constructed boundaries between science on one hand and humanism on the other. The division of study according to perceived expertise and method of study is an important feature of academic discourse (Polanyi 1958) that forms part of a wider demarcation of social groups and knowledge, the importance of which has been frequently recognised by sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers of science (Douglas 1973; Kuhn 1977; Bourdieu 1984). The specific ways in which boundaries are established and maintained through historical conventions have important implications for archaeological practice.

In order to explore the implications of the disjunction between the study of human skeletal remains and material-culture-based archaeology, I want to examine the ways that conventions surrounding practice originate and operate, leading to the institutionalisation of that divide. A critical awareness of the way that fields within the discipline are historically defined and socially maintained is important in order to situate archaeological practice and understand the broader relationship between osteoarchaeology and other forms of archaeological endeavour before returning to a discussion of the implications for bodies themselves.

The origins and establishment of the disciplinary divide

The historical framework that forms the socio-political backdrop to the development of the separate study of past human beings, and of archaeology as an element of that study, has deep and complex roots. The elevation of humankind is the product of a long Judeo-Christian tradition that emphasises the uniqueness of humans within the world (Gans 1985). The nature and form of the distinctive qualities of people have long been a subject of debate (Fudge *et al*. 1999) but classical notions are based on the uniqueness of human culture and language (Ingold 1988). Recent contributions have re-explored these issues to suggest that the particularity of humanness lies in self-consciousness, a perception of the self in relation to others that allows social relations to exist and to be elaborated in and through the material world (Ingold 1986). Conversely, they have questioned the separation of people from animals, suggesting that the irreducible animality of humans may be their only instinct capable of saving them from the excesses of their 'humanity' (Ham and Senior 1997).

The principle of human uniqueness, however, remains key to claims for archaeology as a discipline with its focus on human history. Indeed, the investigation of that uniqueness could be seen as its raison d'être. The rich variety of human lives has challenged fixed ideas of what a human should be. As Clark (1988: 25–6) points out, 'once we realise that human variety is not an error . . . and that we must expect our species always to be variegated, we can begin to think about constructing social orders that will provide a place for all'. The unity of humanity as famously declared in the 1950 and 1951 UNESCO statements is therefore a moral and political statement (Haraway 1988), but it is also one that takes biologism as its starting point, ascribing humanness to members of the species *Homo sapiens*. Creatures that do not belong to this taxon are not human though they might resemble us very closely. The unity of humankind therefore lies in being a breeding population such that 'my ancestors and my descendants alike may be yours as well' (Clark 1988: 25). Human beings are designated and defined through the biological criteria upon which social, intellectual or spiritual characteristics are overlaid. The identification of the body as human allows the study of people as a unit across time and space.

The interpretation of human variation is the challenge that archaeology seeks to meet, but the history of this interpretation has been somewhat chequered. The unity of humankind has not always been seen as self-evident. The biological and the social have been drawn together and enrolled in contests over the relationship between physical characteristics

and social or moral behaviour (Twine 2002). The articulation of race, for example, saw the labelling of particular phenotypes in terms of symbols of cultural characteristics that were deployed in political agendas (Proctor 1988; Gilman 1991). Because phenotypic expression is a level of biology, these differences were presented as neutral 'natural-technical' objects of knowledge, whereas when deconstructed they are temporal, historically situated interpretations of surface variations in appearance in organisms that may be ascribed no determinative impact on patterns of culture or intellectual abilities (Ingold 1986; Banton 1987; Wade 1993; Twine 2002). Similarly, the naturalisation of gender roles represents an interpretation of body differences in which biology is held to determine behaviour in a manner that has been demonstrated to be culturally constructed and historically constituted (Strathern 1980; Haraway 1989; Wade 1993).

Disciplinary structures

In seeking to explore human history, different models of disciplinary structure have emerged largely along national lines with differing approaches to the relationship between the biological and the social. In the English-speaking world, the fourfold approach in the United States incorporating anthropology, archaeology, biological (physical) anthropology and linguistics emerged in the early twentieth century as a direct response to the prevailing articulation of race. While not uncontroversial at the time (Stocking 1968; Barkan 1988; Marks 1995), Franz Boas pioneered an approach that sought to disrupt problematic and undesirable interpretations (Stocking 1968). He advocated a focus on cultural traditions rather than on racial descent (Boas 1911). His ground-breaking and influential work on the relationship between environmental and hereditary effects on body size demonstrated that the human body was not a fixed entity but subject to environmental influence (Boas 1912).

Today, following Boas's philosophy, in academic institutions in the United States the fields of social anthropology, archaeology, biological anthropology and linguistics often co-exist under one umbrella department, although the relationships between them are stronger in some directions than in others, particularly where direct links can be made between past peoples and their living descendants. Nonetheless, there are still boundaries between the fields, particularly when it comes to the study of the human body and the study of objects. Haraway (1988: 210) points out that the disjunction between race and culture in Boasian anthropology, and its overwhelming emphasis on the latter, 'left Boasian physical anthropology at best ambiguously authorized to speak about the

biological dimensions of "man"'. It did, however, claim the study of the physical body as its focus through scientific means. Thus, the study of past human bodies has conventionally been the province of biological anthropology with its interest in human evolution, as well as the study of variation in anatomically modern human groups (Haraway 1988). The post-World War II period saw an emphasis on the importance of behaviour and adaptation in an evolutionary perspective with population-level investigations of health, disease and environmental stress (Spencer 1981; Haraway 1988; Johnson and Mann 1997). Developments from the 1990s on have seen an extension of this perspective with the emergence of a more focused bioarchaeology that tends to stress the interaction between biology and behaviour with concentration on the life-ways of more recent populations recovered from archaeological sites (see Powell *et al.* 1991; Grauer 1995; Larsen 1997). In spirit, these interests mirror Boas's original programme yet also reconfigure it by placing the emphasis on biology as well as human action. With increasing focus on the biological impact of behaviour, this has led on one hand to increasing closeness in questions that are posed by osteoarchaeologists and traditional material-culture archaeologists. On the other hand, it has paradoxically led to a methodological distancing of the study of the physiological body from that of social life.

In Britain, approaches to the relationship between the biological body and social life took another path with an altogether different social and institutional framework to the bringing together of disciplines that characterised the American experience. In Britain, in a pre-war climate of colonialism, the Boasian critique of race did not play a major role and evolutionary anthropology and ideas about the classification of races and ethnic groups remained influential (Barkan 1988, 1992). Furthermore, the emphasis placed on population movement in Europe meant that poor links between past groups and their living counterparts often precluded the development of strong relationships between fields. Institutional distinctions between them were thus largely maintained. Historically, the study of the human body was the province of scholars with medical backgrounds some of whom became interested in the past. This arrangement reinforced the divide between the study of physiology and sociality. Despite a growing interest in human palaeontology, the ethnographic and archaeological study of objects formed distinct areas of study, separated from each other and from the study of the physiological body.

In the wake of World War II, British academia underwent radical changes linked to major shifts in socio-political life and national identity that promoted the rejection of scientific racism and eugenics (Barkan 1992; Spencer 1997). New synthetic theories of evolution led to a flowering of adaptation-based approaches in the study of the bio-history of

humanity. The study of modern humans, however, remained divided with a clear distinction between the examination of objects (archaeology) and bodies (human biology). Given the established, though largely informal, personal and sometimes sporadic links between archaeologists and medical practitioners in Britain, it is perhaps not surprising that a more systematic osteoarchaeology grew largely from the archaeological involvement of scholars with medical backgrounds (Roberts and Manchester 1995; Mays 1997), one of the best-known figures being Calvin Wells. In the theoretical climate of 1960s' Britain, this led to emphasis on diagnosis-orientated case studies analogous to the case histories of living patients and palaeopathology (Mays 1997).

The past decade has seen a rapid rise in the number of human osteoarchaeology courses offered in archaeology departments in British universities and concomitant changes in the backgrounds of workers within the field who no longer exclusively hold science degrees. This reflects the constant state of flux inherent in the wider development of modern archaeology's disciplinary identity. However, the establishment of osteological research has taken place as a distinct epistemological category rather than as a fully integrated sub-field. An important ramification of the external origins of osteoarchaeology has been the persistence of established communication boundaries between osteoarchaeology and interpretative archaeology that act to maintain the 'outsider' status of osteoarchaeology in relation to the discipline as a whole (Sofaer Derevenski 2001). This may be in part because of the historically troublesome dialectic and tension between the biological and the social. In Britain (in contrast to the American Boasian solution), a clear separation between the two is perceived as a way to disentangle and remove the discipline from undesirable connotations that previous linkages created. However, there have been calls for British workers to move towards a more population-based approach characteristic of the United States and to orientate their research towards mainstream archaeological issues (Mays 1997). This might lead to a reconsideration of the relationship between biology and society explored through the human body.

Variation between national traditions of enquiry such as that described between the United States and Britain, is a feature of the development of hybrid fields centred on interdisciplinary co-operation (Lindholm-Romantschuk 1998: 29). Key founding figures set influential and long-lasting research agendas, and their sets of contacts as part of their own personal histories led to the construction of field- and country-specific research networks (Lindholm-Romantschuk 1998: 29). Nonetheless, on both sides of the Atlantic the different disciplinary models have similar outcomes in terms of a divide between the study of the human skeleton

and objects. There is an increasing trend towards the sub-disciplinary specialisation of practitioners, with the division of study falling along essentially typological lines, and skill specialisation according to material differences in the data generating division between different aspects of the study of human history. Hence the widely accepted reliance on ceramic, flint, metal or other specialists in the analysis of objects. When it comes to the study of bones, such specialisation becomes even narrower as not all bones are studied together as a group (Sofaer Derevenski 2001). The elevated status of humans as the focus of study means that human bones are distinguished from those of animals. The study of the human skeleton forms a distinct field with researchers usually being trained and specialising in their analysis alone.

Specialisation and disciplinary boundaries

The study of the physical remains of the human body is thus designated as a specialist activity with a consequent emphasis on skills production as units of academic endeavour (cf. Whitley 1984). Although many osteoarchaeologists are unhappy with perceptions of what they do as a set of techniques rather than a general approach or paradigm (cf. Coles 1995), site reports – the traditional backbone of archaeological publication and a main outlet for the publication of osteoarchaeology – reinforce this perception and render individual elements of investigation highly impermeable to other workers. While those studying the human skeleton feed their results to other archaeologists (often the excavators of a given site) who synthesise a wide range of data presented to them and who are consequently considered to be the arbiters of interpretation, typically the human bone report – like that of other materials such as faunal remains, plants or soils – is published separately at the back of a volume or attached in the form of an appendix. This traditional presentational format reinforces the classification of research outcomes as specialist and promotes a message that such reports are inaccessible or uninteresting to others from outside that specialism (Sofaer Derevenski 2001; Jones 2002a). Indeed, the very idea of 'specialist' suggests a highly defined knowledge base, and the better defined a field is in terms of a shared knowledge base, the more impervious are its external boundaries (Becher 1989). In turn, this results in the separation of osteoarchaeology from other facets of the discipline, leading to feelings of marginalisation (Albarella 2001; Sofaer Derevenski 2001). In common with other specialists in archaeology, osteoarchaeologists are viewed as service providers to those higher up the disciplinary hierarchy who carry out the overall synthesis and thus the 'real' interpretation of the data.

Nonetheless, because others base interpretations on their conclusions, the denotation of particular individuals as specialists lends them a certain authority. The authority invested in specialists and their reports perpetuates the divide between the study of the physical body and interpretative archaeology in as much as the accumulation of authority lends the specialist value and social power. The authority of the archaeological specialist derives both from their perceived personal experience with a body of material accumulated over time, and from the authority given to science as both paradigm and produced outcome of the investigation of that data (Macdonald 1998). Those who study the physical body form part of a wider scientific community in a way that material-culture-based archaeologists do not. One measure of this is the way that osteoarchaeology receives funding for major projects from sources that have interests in other areas of science research. Indeed, the investigation of the human skeleton forms part of the growing sub-discipline of archaeological science, which takes its cue from the hard sciences of physics, chemistry and biology.

Scientific modes of enquiry are often regarded as distinctive and incompatible with humanistic approaches (Jones 2002a). They use different forms of discourse with different terminologies that are reflected in contrasting styles of writing (Joyce 2002a). The construction of disciplinary boundaries along the lines of science and humanism is also visible in outlets for the dissemination of ideas. Other than site reports, edited volumes are often a primary vehicle for formal communication between osteoarchaeology and material-culture-based archaeology. There are comparatively few specifically archaeological journal-based opportunities for direct communication between the fields. Furthermore, although the very emergence of osteoarchaeology indicates that disciplinary boundaries may be permeable, in academic departments osteoarchaeologists rarely contribute to teaching related subjects (cf. Coles 1995). Despite the impact of contextual archaeology, studies of the physical body are rarely integrated with interpretative archaeology in an explicit manner. This is something of a paradox given that the power and value of the body to the investigation of human history is precisely *because* it is the nexus between biology and culture. It appears that disciplinary boundaries present greater barriers in some directions than in others.

The classification of particular activities as science leads to the naturalisation of differences that are socially and culturally constructed. Among philosophers and historians there is scepticism regarding an understanding of science as something special and distinct from other forms of cultural and social activity (Woolgar 1988; Longino 1990) and awareness that science entails cultural assumptions and social relationships

(Macdonald 1998; Fox Keller and Longino 1996). The knowledge production process is created and supported by a social network of scientists (Latour 1987). Views of science as an orderly cumulative enterprise have been challenged (Kuhn 1962) and rhetorical strategies used in the composition of scientific papers analysed (Latour and Woolgar 1979). Academic enquiry is engaged in a continuous struggle for the intellectual legitimacy of ideas and publications (Bourdieu 1969) and is in a constant state of 'essential tension' between innovation and pre-existing knowledge (Kuhn 1977).

The production of knowledge within archaeology, as in any discipline, can be identified as part of a larger organisational system that is both socially and intellectually determined (Merton 1973; Latour 1987), rather than a reflection of some inherent means of categorising knowledge (Lindholm-Romantschuk 1998). Academic disciplines are social constructs (Storer 1972; Lindholm-Romantschuk 1998) and understandings of disciplinarity – in this case the relationship between the study of the physical body (osteoarchaeology) and objects (interpretative archaeology) – may therefore have social and political implications with regard to the perception of particular approaches within the discipline.

Particular bodies

The body in archaeology is caught between the two poles of science and humanism. On one hand there is a tendency to concede the skeletal body to biological science through osteoarchaeology. On the other, there has been an explosion of theorising about the body much of which, while focusing on lived aspects of bodily experience, fails to incorporate the archaeological evidence in terms of the physical body or human remains found in the archaeological record.

There is therefore a need for an archaeologically grounded approach to the body that while recognising and incorporating influences from other disciplines, does so taking cognisance of their value to archaeology and with due regard for the specific archaeological substance of the body. Being unfleshed, archaeological bodies are particular in that they are devoid of those external features that are involved in the primary recognition of the body and which have been a key feature of much theorising about the body and understandings of corporeality in other disciplines. Nor do they have body fluids such as blood or semen which have been key to analysing the body in anthropological works (e.g. Douglas 1966). The dead archaeological body, while a person, by definition lacks the qualities required for action and sociality and can therefore be considered qualitatively different from living bodies. Yet we cannot take an empiricist view