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NATION AND NATIONAL IDEOLOGY PAST, PRESENT AND PROSPECTS

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Nation-Building and the Archaeological Record[1]

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Nationalism requires the elaboration of a real or invented remote past. This paper will discuss specific examples of the use of the remote past from the former Soviet Union, particularly from southern Russia and the Caucasus region. It illustrates how archaeological data have been manipulated for nationalist purposes and how they have been instrumental in stoking antagonisms among ethnic groups, some of which, unfortunately, have led to armed violence. It begins by reviewing the historical relationship between archaeology and nationalism or nation-building politics. Contrastive conceptions of nationality and ethnicity are presented, and it is argued that adoption of modern constructivist perspectives are incompatible with attempting to identify ethnic/national groups solely on the basis of archaeological evidence. After its presentation of examples from the former Soviet Union, it considers peculiar features of the archaeological record and the ways in which the discipline is dependent upon the state for support and, correspondingly, how it is peculiarly susceptible to political manipulation for nation-building purposes. It concludes with a brief consideration of the professional and ethical responsibilities of archaeologists

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confronted with unproveable nationalist interpretations of the archaeological record.

I. Archaeology and Nationalism: Historical Roots and Occurrences

The first point to emphasize is that the practice of archaeology always has a political dimension and that a relationship between archaeology and nationalism and the construction of national identities can be traced throughout this world of nation-states in which we all live. This relationship can be more intense and direct in certain countries, less so in others. The different forms the relationship assumes in different countries can be ascertained and understood for historically specific reasons. Thus, to take an obvious example from the New World, the use of archaeology for nation-building purposes in Argentina or the United States, countries largely composed of immigrants from the Old World, differs substantially from its use in countries, like Mexico and Peru, with their large indigenous and *mestizo* populations. It can be argued also from a historical perspective that the relationship between nationalism and archaeology has been so intimate and close that it has been assumed to be natural and remained largely unquestioned in the archaeological literature until quite recently.

Archaeology developed as a systematic discipline during the 19th century, and its growth can largely be understood as the result of three formative influences. The first formative influence in the development of archaeology was the rebirth of interest in Classical antiquities and then in the historical events recorded in the Bible. During the 18th and 19th centuries, these interests were further stimulated by European imperial expansion into the lands of the Ottoman Empire and beyond.

The second major formative influence was the emergence of the disciplines of geology and biology in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and particularly the acceptance of evolutionary thought, culminating, of course, in the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859. Chronological horizons similarly were broadened with the discovery and classification of extinct forms of life and the development of paleontology, which also occurred during the first half of the 19th century. Gradually the concept of prehistory, the reconstruction of a long past prior to the existence of written documents through the analysis of material remains, was accepted.

The final major influence on the development of archaeology was the search for and celebration of national identity that coincided with the development of modern nation-states. So-called antiquarians had long observed and speculated over the major standing physical monuments within their native lands. As chronological horizons broadened, as methods for recording and analyzing material remains improved, and as modern nation-states emerged and attachments to one's country became more tangible and concrete, these monuments were increasingly seen as the products of their own ancestors. National roots and origins could be traced through the discovery and interpretation of the material remains found on one's native soil. Nations not only had a history that extended back for centuries or a few millennia at most, but also a prehistory that extended back or could be interpreted as extending back almost indefinitely into time immemorial, providing a primordial attachment between a people and the land they occupied. Probably the most famous example of this process was the establishment of the Museum of Northern Antiquities that opened in Copenhagen in 1819 under the direction of C.J. Thomsen, who had organized its materials under his recently devised Three Age system of successive Stone, Bronze, and

Iron periods. Denmark had suffered setbacks in the Napoleonic Wars, and the precocious development of Danish prehistory during the early and mid- 19th century must be understood against this backdrop of territorial loss and cultural retrenchment.

Each emergent nation-state had to construct its own national identity that required the active rediscovery, inventing, or even forgetting and misremembering of one's past. Unfortunately, there is no time here to trace these constructions in any detail. Suffice it to note that the practice of archaeology and the institutional forms it acquired differed from state to state in part because each state had its own specific history and time of national consolidation. The nationalist significance accorded to archaeological data also varied from country to country for different reasons, including the availability of historical records and the relative weighting of historical to archaeological sources, and the empirical contents of those records. Archaeology's relationship to the state could take the relatively innocuous and necessary form of the detailed compilation of the prehistoric and early historic sequence for a region or an entire nation.

The introduction of the archaeological culture concept at the end of the 19th century, which was developed by G. Kossinna and later refined by V.G. Childe, took the ethnographer's concept of *culture* and applied it to past physical remains; things that looked alike and seemed to exist within relatively restricted spatial and temporal horizons were lumped together and defined as belonging to the same archaeological culture, implicitly, if not always explicitly, analogous to the ethnographer's culture. The concept was dangerously simplifying for it overlooked the obvious facts that different peoples can have similar physical remains or material cultures, and that the same group can possess different physical remains,

depending upon such factors as diversity within the group or the different functions performed by the materials in question (*e.g.*, fortresses differ from monasteries not because they are necessarily occupied by different peoples, but because of the different primary activities performed within them). Nevertheless, the archaeological culture concept is still used today as the basic means for ordering the material record and for reconstructing the prehistoric past. Its uncritical use paves the way for nationalist interpretations in which specific archaeological cultures are unproblematically seen as ancestral to contemporary ethnic or national groups.

This very common procedure accepts a static primordial or essentialist conception of ethnicity/nationality and can even be promoted by explicit state policies. The case of Soviet archaeology and its use of ethnogenesis, the formation of *ethnoi*, is instructive in this respect.

The officially sanctioned Soviet conception of an *ethnos* explicitly adopted a primordialist or essentialist conception of ethnicity; *i.e*, attachment to an ethnic group was based on supposedly objective, relatively fixed criteria, such as language, racial group, dress, house forms, cuisine, and other cultural traditions or time-honored ways of doing things. This view sharply contrasts with the more situational and relational conception of ethnic identity favored today by most Western anthropologists and historians. From this latter perspective, a group is a distinct *ethnos* that considers itself such and is considered such by other groups. This attribute of categorization, particularly self-categorization, is most important, a feature for which there is no necessary material culture correlate.

The Soviet *ethnos* and the classic concept of an archaeological culture resemble one another, and both contrast sharply with more modern views of ethnicity and nationality.

These latter insist that ethnic groups are malleable and constantly changing as the historical situation in which they exist unfolds; ethnicity, like culture, is never made, but is always "in the making" or, perhaps, if times are tough "in the unmaking" or "in the disappearing". Ethnicity and nationality are conceived similarly in that they are socially constructed phenomena in which traditions are invented and consciously manipulated for political, economic, and social reasons. Ethnicity is a more universal form of collective group identity with a past that may extend back to earlier historic times, indeed, perhaps, into the mists of prehistory, but it can never be securely traced on the basis of archaeological evidence alone. An archaeology of ethnicity, in short, is an impossible undertaking if one accepts this constructivist perspective on ethnic and national identity, while it is a relatively straightforward exercise if one adopts the Soviet concept of *ethnos* or if one uncritically equates archaeological cultures with living or past ethnic groups.

A related concept, which became central to the practice of Soviet ethnology, archaeology, and physical anthropology from the mid-1930s on, is ethnogenesis or the historical formation of peoples. The determination of ethnogenesis became one of the central tasks of Soviet archaeology when the discipline switched from a Marxist-inspired internationalism (or, perhaps, politically motivated universalism) to one concerned principally with the ethnogenetic history of the early Slavs; i.e., when Great Russian chauvinism and the build-up to the Great Patriotic War replaced this internationalism (Shnirelman 1995: 129-132). Ironically, the effect of this transformation was to have every ethnicity/nationality alike, Russian and non-Russian, engaged in this ethnogenetic mandate or search for its origins. Peoples wanted to determine when they came into being and what they could authentically claim was their original homeland.

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Competition over the remote past was fueled by the ethnogenetic imperative, and this task was intimately tied to the very structure of the Soviet multi-ethnic federal state. Administrative units (Republics and Autonomous Republics, Provinces, and Regions) were named for specific ethnic groups, although they always contained more than a single *ethnos* and in many there was no ethnic majority. It was an easy and logical step to transform the precisely defined borders of these ethno-administrative units into the national territory or homeland of the eponymous *ethnos*. This process, in turn, could be legitimized through the selective ethnic interpretation of the archaeological record, reifying the political unit by according it great antiquity. In Ronald Suny's striking phrase (1993: 87), the Soviet Union became the great "incubator of new nations", a source for many of the conflicts that have arisen since the state self-destructed.

Theoretically, the use of the concept of ethnogenesis is linked directly to one's concept of the *ethnos*: something durable and well-nigh permanent, as in the Soviet perspective, or something constantly changing, as favored by most Western scholars. For the former, the determination of origins is the critical question. When did the ethnic group, conceived as a little preformed homunculus already possessing all the essentially defined characteristics of the given *ethnos*, come into being – during the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, with the collapse of Classical Antiquity and the ensuing Great Migrations, or after the conquests of Timur or Chingghis Khan? It is perceived as a straightforward historical question with an ascertainable answer to be provided by the archaeologist's spade or by some long-overlooked or recently discovered historical document.

For the Western scholar, the problem is much more complex, indeed essentially unsolvable. Ethnogenesis is only

a relatively minor matter associated with the beginnings or initial formation of a given ethnic group; more significant and more complex are the changes that group will experience over time or its ethnomorphosis. These changes may – though do not necessarily – lead to the appearance of new ethnic groups through processes of assimilation and/or fundamental change or disappearance through various natural or human-induced processes, such as genocide. Even an ethnic group that exhibits considerable continuity and stability over long periods of historical time will nevertheless change in fundamental ways; thus, for example, pre-Christian Armenia of the Iron Age differs from Christian Armenia of the Middle Ages and from the newly formed Republic of Armenia today (Kohl 1996).

Obviously, both perspectives have some degree of merit: continuities, as well as changes, can be documented for this Armenian experience or for many, relatively long-lived ethnic groups. Cultural traditions cannot be fabricated out of whole cloth; there are real limits to the inventions of tradition. As E. Hobsbawm (1992) argues, states or nationalist politicians may, in fact, make nations, but they cannot totally make them up. It should be obvious that one could not have constructed mid-to-late 19th century Italians out of the Chinese or New Guinean cultural traditions. Here it is useful to distinguish between strict and contextual constructivism. The former denies any constraints imposed by past or current realities and quickly devolves into the hopelessly relativist morass of some post-modern criticisms. Contextual constructivism, the theory advocated here, on the other hand, accepts the fact that social phenomena are continuously constructed and manipulated for historically ascertainable reasons, but it does not deny an external world, a partially apprehensible objective reality, that cannot totally be reduced to invention or social construction. Representations or constructed cultural perceptions are real,

but reality encompasses more than representations and exists independently from them.

II. Archaeology and Nationalism in the Northern and Southern Caucasus

Let us now turn to how the ethnogenetic mandate in Soviet archaeology plays itself out today in the post-Soviet space of the Caucasus where the three newly recognized nations of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan exist alongside aspirant but still unsuccessful nationalities, like the Chechens, and other acutely self-conscious ethnic groups. The most egregious abuses of the remote past in the Caucasus have been associated with the political imperative to be sovereign, to rule over increasingly homogeneous, well-demarcated areas that have been ethnically cleansed of other claimants to these lands. The redefinition of the political geography of this former part of the Soviet Union is the central issue defining most of the conflicts that have broken out during the past decade. As in most areas of the world, the political geography of the Caucasus is only partially based upon its physical or natural features. In terms of physical geography, the defining feature of the Caucasus as a culture area is, of course, the perpetually snow-capped Great Caucasian mountain range stretching c. 1200 km. northwest to southeast between the Black and Caspian Seas. Mountainous areas typically are characterized by considerable ethnic diversity, a feature for which the Caucasus is renowned. Ethnic diversity in the Caucasus, however, is not only or even primarily the product of physical geography, but rather of history and of the constant movements of peoples from the south or the ancient Near East and from the north off the Eurasian steppes into this beautiful land. The historical record extends back for nearly three millennia, and many ethnic groups maintain a plausible

historical consciousness – sometimes reinforced by early literacy – that stretches back for centuries, if not millennia.

While the exact borders of the Caucasus area are hard to define, particularly as the area imperceptibly merges with the ranges of the Little Caucasus Mountains and the Anatolian Plateau to the south, there is no debate that the Caucasus as a whole contains the greatest ethnic and today national diversity in the former Soviet Union. Most significantly, all these peoples are squeezed into a relatively restricted area. The fact that so many peoples live cheek-by-jowl next to one another goes a long way in explaining the recent rise of ethnic tensions and conflicts throughout the region. Caucasian peoples have both co-existed peacefully and fought with each other over the millennia. Ethnic enmities too should not be naturalized or essentialized but historically explained, and a partial explanation for the recent outbreak in ethnic tensions will attribute them to the conscious manipulation of the remote past by politicians, journalists, and even supposedly reputable scholars such as archaeologists.

K. Said's fascinating historical novel *Ali and Nino* contains a revealing, sadly ironic scene (2000: 41) that epitomizes one of the problems characteristic of Caucasian historical consciousness: it is 1914; the Great War to end all Wars is about to begin; and the action takes place in Karabagh. An Azeri properly reproaches an Armenian for claiming that the Christian Church in Shusha was five thousand years old. Nonplussed, the Armenian replies: "The Christian faith may be only two thousand years old in other countries. But to us, the people of Karabagh, the Saviour showed the light three thousand years before the others." Claims to the remote past beget other claims to the remote past, engendering ever more hyperbolic and implausible claims to land or to the cultural accomplishments of one's own people. One can refer to ethnic

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competition over antiquity in the Caucasus, but one should not trivialize it, since these exaggerated claims often motivate people in their bloody conflicts with their neighbors.

Numerous recent examples of grossly implausible assertions about the past can be cited for both the northern and southern Caucasus (cf. Markovin 1990, translated into English in Balzer 1991; and Kohl and Tstetskhladze 1995). Very briefly, let me summarize some recent cases, which have been collected and devastatingly critiqued by Markovin (1994; all references to other studies can be found here): a Chechen journalist, A. Izmailov, attempts to link the Chechen/Vainakh people with ancient Pharaonic Egypt, while another, Yu. Khadzhiev, sees the Chechens as historically related to the ancient Etruscans of Italy and the Basques of northern Spain. More plausibly but still problematically, is Kh. Bakaev's genetic connection between the Chechens and the Hurrians/Urartians or Bronze and Iron Age peoples of Caucasian or east Anatolian origin, who are known both archaeologically and from ancient cuneiform sources. Here the direct link cannot be established, but the more generic relationship with peoples speaking a language of the northeast Nakh-Daghestani Caucasian group of languages is generally accepted. For northern Ossetia, which has now significantly been renamed Alaniya after the Alans, Markovin cites the work of V.L. Khamitsev who claims that Jesus Christ was an Ossetian or, at least spoke, Ossetian, and that this language spread throughout Europe all the way to the British Isles and continued to be spoken into the late Middle Ages, as it was the mother tongue of Frederick Barbarossa! According to Khamitsev, the area of Biblical Galilee was populated by ethnic Scythians, who are perceived unproblematically as ancestors of the Ossetians, and the Virgin Mary was a Scythian. Markovin (cf. also Chernykh 1995: 143) also critically scrutinizes the more "scholarly" writings of I.M.

Miziev who attempts to link the archaeologically defined mid-fourth to early third millennium B.C. Maikop culture of the northern Caucasus with the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia and then shows how the Sumerian language is historically related to his own Karachai-Balkar Turkic dialect.

Such claims appear to be so preposterous as not to require serious rebuttal, but easy dismissal is the wrong and irresponsible reaction. The past is both competed for and fought over in the Caucasus. As this is the case, pasts are constructed that often deviate sharply from more objective efforts at understanding an always incomplete and deficient early historical or archaeological record. Tendentious, chauvinist pasts must not be embraced as alternative accounts of an infinitely malleable past; rather, they should be resisted, since they are one of the important ingredients stoking the current flames of ethnic conflict in the Caucasus. The very widespread popularity of some of these problematic readings underscores the depth of the problem. Let me cite just one additional example. In 1995, G.A. Abduragimov published a book entitled *Kavkazkaya Albaniya – Lezgistan* that purportedly demonstrated that the ethnic ancestors of the Lezgin people can be traced back in an unbroken, continuous line to Chalcolithic and Bronze Age times. The story, embellished by the Lezgin translation of hitherto unpublished and published Caucasian Albanian texts, purports to provide the historical basis for an autonomous Lezgistan, a newly aspirant Caucasian nationality. This tendentious work was handsomely published at a time when more objective scholarly studies did not appear or were not produced in such an attractive, profusely illustrated fashion. Obviously, there are both markets for such publications and private individuals or sponsors with sufficient resources to underwrite them.

III. A Case Study: the Material Remains of Djavakheti, Ancestral Claims, State Policies and the Shortness of Human Experience and Memory

Ethnic competition in the Caucasus over the remote past takes certain predictable forms: preposterous land claims; dubious genetic links to famous ancient peoples; and a litany of cultural achievements that confirm the superiority of one given ethnic group over others. Needless to say, this competition seems all the more ludicrous when one adopts the more dynamic, historically sensitive conception of ethnicity argued for above. Another observation, consistent with the "contextual constructivist", non-essentialist conception of ethnicity, is the fact that time too is relative and the remote, ancestral past can be fairly recent – even in the Caucasus. This point can be documented by consideration of the material remains of Djavakheti or southern Georgia, a contested area which today is populated overwhelmingly (up to 80%) by ethnic Armenians and in which there is currently an active separatist movement.

Travelling across the open volcanic landscape of Djavakheti, one observes dilapidated Georgian churches with Georgian inscriptions, some of which date back to the first millennium AD, standing alongside functioning Armenian churches that date to the nineteenth century. The famous Wardzhia cave monastery complex is located here. It contains one of the only surviving portraits of Queen Tamar, who ruled at the height of the Georgian medieval kingdom, and it is such an important symbol of Georgian nationality that it figured prominently on their new state currency – the *lari*, Despite the clear markers of an earlier Georgian *Christian* presence in the area, historical priority is still debated between the local minority Georgians and majority Armenians. The latter, who

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came into this depopulated area after 1828 or after the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchai that established the international borders between the Persian Qajar, Ottoman, and Russian empires, can still claim that the region was part of greater Armenia during the first century BC reign of Tigran the Great. Possibly so, though Tigran ruled over a multi-ethnic kingdom, and it is not clear what ethnicity occupied Djavakheti in classical times or, even earlier, during the Iron and Bronze Ages. We are only really certain of proper ethnic attribution when we find those Georgian churches with their Georgian inscriptions. Moreover as argued earlier (Kohl and Tsetskhladze 1995: 161):

> The ethnicity of the people who dominantly occupied this territory during Iron Age and Classical times.... is unknown, and even the hypothetical (and improbable) discovery someday of inscriptions proving that most peoples in the area then spoke an Indo-European, Proto-Armenian or Armenian-related language would not erase the Georgian historical claim to the area. This conclusion follows directly from the... ever-developing nature of cultures and the fact that Christianity has been an integral component of both Georgian and Armenian cultures for centuries; one simply cannot ignore those beautiful monastery complexes and churches with their Georgian inscriptions. Admitting this, however, does not provide an excuse for the current Georgian *state policy* of deliberately underdeveloping the area and hindering communications and transportation between the local Armenian populations and their ethnic relatives to the south. Surely many generations of Armenians have lived and died on this soil since arriving *en masse* after 1828, and this fact alone is obviously relevant to their just treatment and the rights that they deserve. The Bible or even Biblical archaeology may be invoked to legitimize an historical claim to the West Bank, but such a claim (however problematic in

itself) cannot be used to justify an Israeli *state policy* of uprooting Palestinian orchards and olive groves or demolishing their homes. These issues must be kept separate, and any honest archaeologist should be capable of distinguishing between them.

Human memories are also constrained ultimately by human lifetimes and the length of human generations, and these latter, relative to antiquity and to the depth of historical consciousness throughout the Caucasus, are remarkably short, though nonetheless real. In 1991, I and a Georgian colleague of mine were placed effectively under house arrest for taking pictures of stone statues in a cemetery in a little Armenian village in southern Georgia not far from the Turkish border. We were suspected of being agents of the Georgian state (still then a nominal Soviet Republic of the collapsing Soviet state), possibly intriguing against the local Armenians and trying to resettle ethnic Georgians on this contested land. While our archaeological cover was checked out, we became friends – over several bottles of vodka – with our Armenian jailer/host, who was a member of a local vigilante group, minimally engaged in protecting Armenian rights in the area. He was a sensitive artist/scupltor, who had been living in Leninakan (now Gyumri), Armenia's second largest city which is located in northwestern Armenia almost directly contiguous with Djavakheti, until December 1988 when the city was devastated by a massive earthquake. His family had survived, but his apartment had been destroyed and his sister and her family had been killed in this traumatic event. He decided to return to his ancestral home where his mother still lived and sculpt a monument over the grave of his sister whose remains had also been transported to their ancestral cemetery in this little village

in southern Georgia where their forebears had been living since arriving in 1828.

The point should be obvious. One of the tragedies about the confusion of the "remote" past with the present is that people live in the present and their attachment to their land, their culture and the like is conditioned by their own lifetime experiences. An ancestral village may be only a few hundred years old, but that is more than sufficient time for the people who live there, and it is only unscrupulous politicians or nationalist fanatics who would argue otherwise. Archaeologists and other scholars of antiquity should not provide always-problematic and dubious evidence for the latter to utilize.

It is misleading, however, to single out the Caucasus as the only or the most egregious region of the former Soviet Union where one can observe nationalist distortions of the remote past. The problem is endemic everywhere (cf. Chernykh 1995), including its practice in the Russian heartland by some Russian archaeologists. Thus, recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the search for Aryans and the Aryan homeland, terms that often in reality represent little more than linguistic-based glosses for proto-Slav and proto-Russian peoples and their homelands. This quest has a lengthy history, and the proposed homelands have been by no means limited to Slavic lands. Nevertheless, post-Soviet space has witnessed the emergence of numerous new cults, often quasi-religious in character, that explicitly identify and make use of archaeological remains, and some of these can only be described as nationalistic and, in the case of the Aryan or Indo-Aryan myth, even neo-Nazi in character. Wittingly or not, some archaeologists have consciously tolerated the neo-Nazi Aryan identification of their sites, even justifying their allowance on the fashionable basis

of postmodern multiple perspectives on the past (cf. D.G. Zdanovich 1999: 33-37).

For example, the undeniably important discoveries of planned Late Bronze Sintashta/Arkaim settlements in the trans-Ural region south of Chelyabinsk, Russia has stimulated an explosion of articles – ranging from the scientific to the semi-popular to the nationalistic – nearly all attempting to identify ethnically the makers of these settlements (Arkaim 1999: 52-104). The archaeologists involved have saved many of these settlements from destruction by setting up theme parks and outdoor museums that attract annually now to this remote region thousands of tourists and what can only be called pilgrims. The archaeologists' efforts have unquestionably accomplished much. The Aryan identification that is officially promoted or discussed also at first glance appears to be fairly innocuous and academically abstract: the concern is just with the precise identification of an ancient homeland for a linguistically reconstructed ethnic group long thought to have been located somewhere on the western Eurasian steppes. For reasons already discussed, such a concern may be fundamentally mistaken and incapable of ever being definitively demonstrated, but is it, as well, ethically or morally questionable? Russia today is far from being a totally stable country and has experienced many severe economic and ideological dislocations during the past decade. In such a context the cultivation of politically charged myths and tolerance for extremist nationalist groups that are attracted to and embrace such myths are very dangerous practices. At the very least, they deserve to be closely and critically monitored (cf. Shnirelman 1998 a and b; 1999). Questions inevitably arise as to what are the responsibilities of archaeologists who are trying to interpret incomplete, ambiguous material remains

and who always necessarily function in specific political contexts.

IV. Professional and Ethical Responsibilities: the Ambiguities of Prehistoric Evidence and Managing Nationalist Interpretations of the Prehistoric Past

The interpretation of the archaeological record is hardly ever straightforward, resulting in unambiguous, certain reconstructions of the past. This well-recognized fact, however, does not mean that archaeological data are capable of an infinite number of possible interpretations or that there are no canons of evidence and criteria that would allow most professional archaeologists in many, if not most, cases to arrive at the same, most plausible 'reading' of that record. There are or should be limits to one's embrace of hearing alternative, multiple voices on the archaeologically reconstructed past. Basic historiographic principles still apply. Certain facts are capable of being documented; others remain open to a variety of interpretations.

How then does one evaluate patently nationalist interpretations of the archaeological record? Are legitimate, long-neglected and overlooked voices on the past now finally being articulated? Is such a development something to welcome or to query, and, if the latter, why and on what basis: scientific or ethical? A common nationalist reading of the past is to identify the entities archaeologists define, particularly archaeological cultures, in terms of an ethnic group ancestral to the nationality or aspirant nationality of interest. Such identifications provide the nationality in question with a respectable pedigree extending back into the remote past, firmly rooted in the national territory; land and people are united. Once made, such identifications then can be extended to

interpret progressive changes, cultural developments in the archaeological record as due to the activities of this ancestral ethnic group. If other evidence, such as that provided by linguistics and historical comparative philology, contradicts the model of autochthonous development, it typically can be accommodated. Now the gifted group in question moves into the national territory – migrates or whatever, finding either empty space or benighted indigenes whom it civilizes or eradicates. Such nationalist interpretations are capable of endlessly accommodating contradictory evidence. For example, today's 'Macedonians', the dominant ethnic group in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, are linguistically and culturally-related to other southern Slavic peoples who migrated into the Balkans roughly during the middle of the first millennium AD; like the Serbs, they profess a form of Christian Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, they consider themselves as heirs of the ancient Macedonians of classical times and claim Alexander the Great as an ancestor, a view that is historically and linguistically untenable.

Such reconstructions may at times seem perfectly consistent with the archaeological record, but such consistency is deceptive. The principal problem lies in the purported ethnic identification; as discussed above, archaeological cultures and ethnic groups are not synonymous and modern constructivist perspectives on ethnicity and nationality preclude the possibility of a perfect correlation between material remains and ethnicity. Peoples' sense of themselves – who they are and what they have done – continuously change and cannot be held constant over centuries, much less millennia. Ethnicities are not little perfectly formed homunculi or crystallized essences containing within them all the characteristics of their future development; rather, they are caught up in, even buffeted by, larger historical processes capable of altering and destroying them. The

identification of some archaeological culture as ancestral to a given ethnic group represents a hopeless will'-o'-the-wisp', a chimera incapable of satisfactory determination. Moreover, the quest for such identifications is not only misleading, but also dangerous, as our review of current interpretations of material remains in the Caucasus hopefully has made clear. Changes in the archaeological record cannot be exclusively explained by the activities of efficient causal agents, the gifted ethnic actors; numerous other factors, such as environmental and climatic changes, must also always be considered. If prehistory teaches us anything, it is that cultures borrow from one another, that technological developments are shared and diffuse rapidly, and that specific cultures and areas have not only advanced and developed, but also declined, often catastrophically. In short, for many reasons nationalist interpretations of the past are, at best, problematic and should be so recognized.

Archaeological evidence may be peculiarly susceptible to manipulation for nationalist purposes because it is physical and visible to a nation's citizens who interact with it, consciously or not, on a daily basis. Archaeological sites become national monuments which now increasingly are transformed into lucrative tourist attractions; their artifacts are stored and displayed in national museums and constitute an invaluable part of the national patrimony, a heritage which becomes more and more broadly defined. Both sites and artifacts frequently are incorporated into state regalia as symbols appearing on national flags, currency and stamps or immemorialized in patriotic songs and national anthems. Maps are compiled showing the distribution of sites identified ethnically and considered to be part of the state's cultural patrimony; not infrequently, such sites are located beyond the state borders, their representation then constituting an implicit

ancestral claim on a neighboring state's territories. Even objects of mass consumption, such as postcards and cigarette brands, may depict or be named after ancient sites. All such uses demonstrate forcefully how national identity is continuously constructed through the commemoration of the remote, archaeologically ascertainable past.

Nationalism and archaeology are also inextricably related at the level of state support for research and employment. Archaeologists often work directly for state institutions, such as museums, research institutes, or antiquities services; even in the atypically decentralized context of the United States, most American archaeologists, whether employed by private or state institutions, must still solicit federally financed foundations for funds to support their research. Are archaeologists then peculiarly vulnerable to state pressures and manipulations for current political purposes, more so than, say, historians who theoretically interrogate their sources without direct state interference? Is it inevitable that the discipline of archaeology is necessarily in some critical respects at the service of the state? Quite often the connection between the state and archaeology may be mutually beneficial, a source of strength, not difficulty. A state needs an educated elite citizenry, and the instillment of national pride in past accomplishments may be appropriate and laudatory. But what happens when the state's agenda or the popular movements driving that agenda appear more questionable on moral grounds or when the archaeologist is asked to verify some implausible, nationalist-inspired reading of the past? What are the professional and ethical responsibilities of archaeologists who function in the shadow of such states?

Ethnic identifications of archaeological cultures that existed thousands of years earlier and made without supporting inscriptional or historical evidence are nearly always

problematic for the theoretical and methodological reasons already discussed. Ethnic groups rarely exhibit such continuity in their material remains, and extrapolations from the historically known to the ambiguities of prehistoric evidence are fraught with uncertainty. The professional responsibility of the archaeologist confronted with such interpretations is straightforward: emphasize that the identification is uncertain and tenuous and stress the real epistemological limits that circumscribe our ability to people the remote prehistoric past.

Archaeology benefits from the critically reflexive recognition that its data is inherently political: excavated and interpreted in a political context and capable of being used for a variety of political purposes, including legitimizing nationalist programs. Acceptance of the political dimension of archaeology also entails moral and ethical consequences, and it is useful to distinguish these from the professional responsibilities, though these considerations, of course, may overlap. That is, an archaeologist who questions a specific prehistoric ethnic identification may be behaving in a way that is both professionally and ethically responsible. Archaeologists should be capable of distinguishing between what they can responsibly say as professional archaeologists or as prehistorians attempting to reconstruct the past and their own political views and the ways in which their knowledge can be used for political purposes. Archaeologists then may be able to support a particular reconstruction of the past as plausible or as the most reasonable interpretation of the data and still condemn the political uses to which it may be put. For example, even if the foundation of a Hindu temple had been uncovered by archaeologists beneath the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India (which it had not, cf. Mandal 1993), responsible archaeologists still could and should have decried the destruction of the

mosque. Similarly, whether or not today's Slavic-speaking 'Macedonians' deserve an internationally recognized nation-state is a different question from whether or not they can trace their ancestry back to Alexander. The archaeological evidence can be decoupled from the political movement or state policy.

Ethical standards for accepting or rejecting nationalist uses of archaeology may vary in specific cases and to some extent, but they should ideally satisfy the following three criteria: 1) the construction of one group's national past should not be made at the expense of another's; 2) all cultural traditions should be recognized as worthy of study and respect; and 3) the construction of a national past should not be made at the expense of abandoning the universal anthropological perspective of our common humanity and shared past and future, recognition of which constitutes the enduring value of prehistory.

Archaeological data inevitably will continue to be manipulated for political purposes. Nevertheless, if these criteria are maintained, the nationalist abuse and distortion of the prehistoric past should be minimized.

To conclude, there is an illusory specificity about the archaeological record, particularly the prehistoric record. It is concrete and tangible, but it is also always mute, and attempts to identify national or ethnic groups solely on its basis are at best speculative and at worst misleading and dangerous. The prehistoric record is always deafeningly silent as to which ethnic or national groups produced the material remains that constitute it.

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