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 BOOK REVIEWS

LEWIS R. BINFORD *Debating Archaeology*. Studies in Archaeology. Academic Press, San Diego, 1989. xv, 534pp, maps, illus., 28.50 (Hard) ISBN 0-12-100045-1

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This book constitutes volume three of the collected shorter works of Lewis Binford, being preceded by *An Archaeological Perspective* (Binford 1972) and *Working at Archaeology* (Binford 1983b). The entire canon so far also contains two collections of papers mostly written by others: *New Perspectives in Archaeology* (Binford and Binford 1968) and *For Theory Building in Archaeology* (Binford 1977); as well as three full-length books: *Nunamiut Ethnoarchaeology* (Binford 1978), *Bones* (Binford 1981) and *Faunal Remains from Klasies River Mouth* (Binford 1984); and a collection of lectures: *In Pursuit of the Past* (Binford 1983a). Accordingly, this book does not stand alone and should perhaps be treated as one of a set (*The Complete Works of Lewis R. Binford [and some of his associates], edited [mostly] by the author*).

This book consists of twenty-nine papers published over a period of years concerning the research interests of an individual who has made -- and will no doubt continue to make -- important contributions to the archaeological literature and to archaeological theory. The type of paper reproduced varies from book reviews (of *Reading the Past* [Hodder 1986]), private letters (to H.T. Bunn), papers prepared but (?) not given (Chapter 27: "Technology of Early Man: an organisational approach to the Oldowan") and papers from other books and journals to linking chapters written specifically for this volume. Subjects range from personal perspectives on the recent history of archaeology, questions on the meaning and significance of 'style', ethnoarchaeological research and its implications for the formation of the archaeological record, the application of quantitative approaches, to the analysis of bone assemblages and the reinterpretation of Lower Palaeolithic material.

The book has a specific aim in view which differs from that of the other volumes in the Binford set. This is to address the issue of debate in archaeology and "to guide the brave student into a disputatious field of great diversity and enormous breadth" (p.xiii). To illustrate the breadth of archaeology, Binford lists some of the various types of archaeology of which he is aware: contextual, behavioural, social, Marxist, historical, demographic, Southwest, Palaeolithic, nationalist, humanist, classical and realist (p.3). Such a listing would not be of great help

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to any student (the list is all he gets) since geographical (Southwest) and period (Palaeolithic, classical, historical) divisions are rather randomly mixed in with interpretive and methodological approaches (contextual, behavioural, social, Marxist, humanist, realist) and specialist fields of data (demographic) as well as critical terms applied to the use or abuse of archaeology (nationalist). But Binford's point is rather more sophisticated than merely citing how many different kinds of archaeology there are: he is also saying that while targeting specific areas of interest is a legitimate scholarly tactic, to partition archaeology by reference to "how to go about the difficult job of inferring any kind of past" (p.4) is *not* legitimate. This position provides the theme of the book: perhaps it does not come as too much of a surprise to discover that thereafter this volume is devoted to advancing, justifying and defending Binford's own approach at the expense of those of his critics.

This book is full of lists: after listing types of archaeology, Binford goes on to list types of archaeologist. *Yippie* archaeologists are those who believe that "disciplinary progress results from awareness, from self-examination, from... [a] value-laden, humanistic approach to improving ourselves" (p.5). *Yuppie* archaeologists rely upon gadgetry and acronyms: a typical Yuppie paper may be entitled "using LSA [landsat aids] for PM [predictive modelling] in CRM studies on BM [Black Mesa]" (or even "chi-squares I have known and loved") (p.6). *Guppies* (who come in for most criticism in the book) are those who steep themselves in evidence and endeavour to retain control of it to the detriment of other archaeologists. *Puppies* are the young proteges of Guppies. *Lollies* are "musically oriented" and advise us to "make up the words as we go along" since "the albatross around archaeologists' necks is methodology and a concern with epistemology" (p.9). Binford himself is, of course, a "Jolly".

Binford takes the view that "much [archaeological] literature arises from the bruised egos of participants [in debate, and the] inappropriate epistemological position of most practising archaeologists" (p.11). All his opponents in debate (Yippie, Guppie, Lollie or whatever) are accused of 'traditional' archaeology, against which stands the 'New Archaeology': "the new archaeology was dedicated to the scientific growth of knowledge; this goes on today in spite of much opposition" (p.23).

Types of inappropriate argument -- of which all non-Binfordian archaeologists seem to be guilty -- are resolved into three. The first is the *ad hominem* argument, which accuses the person being criticised of bad character or low intelligence, either by implication or by saying it outright. The second is the argument *ad ignorantum*, which relies on the ignorance of the reader for its plausibility; this is "a strategy ready-made for the Guppie... [whose arguments depend] for their acceptance upon others not having the needed knowledge to pass judgements upon them" (p.75). Thirdly, there is the *ignoratio elenchi*, the 'straw man' argument which demolishes a contention that was never made. Throughout the book, Binford endeavours to

show that his critics are using one (and sometimes more) of this type of argument against him and, worse, refusing to engage in debate about archaeological issues.

Binford's response to this perceived unfairness is to use humour. The problem is that his use of humour reads very often like the kind of thing he so dislikes in others: comparisons are always odious, but some who use humour in their archaeological writing do so with a lighter touch (e.g. the final chapters in Flannery 1976 and 1986, whose gently comic characters read as if they are aspects of Flannery's own personality rather than other individuals). In particular, Part II of Binford's book -- Chapters 3 to 6 -- is entitled "Much Ado About Nothing" and is little more than a protracted *ad hominem* assault on Ian Hodder, with others of the 'post-processualist school' thrown in for good measure. The opening line of his review of *Reading the Past* perhaps gives an idea of the unsavoury flavour of this section: "this is a little book with a little message being blown through a large horn with a loud noise" (p.69). Part III ("Empiricism and Other Problems in Contemporary Archaeology") takes on other contestants, of whom I rather gained the impression Binford thought they should be taken more seriously than the 'post-processualists'. Among the new entrants are Freeman (one mention), Richard Gould (five), Sackett (two) and 'honourable mentions' for Schiffer and Hodder. Part IV ("Models and Accommodating Arguments versus Pattern Recognition: what drives research best?") brings in Glynn Isaac and Mary Leakey among others (although in Chapter 27: "Technology of Early Man: an organisational approach to the Oldowan" she is criticised for coming to the same conclusions as Binford although without his hard analytical work).

It is Binford's contention that archaeologists "do not study human behaviour,... symbolic codes,... social systems,... ancient cultures,... ancient settlements, nor ... the past" but "artifacts" (p.3). These he defines broadly as "all of those modifications of natural materials and... of artifacts themselves that humans and hominids produce as a result of their lifeways" (3). He is insistent that archaeology is a science, and "the goals of science are to understand the external world in terms of itself" (p.10). Thus, "an archaeological scientist must accept the challenge to understand the past in its own terms" (p.10). Accordingly, he rejects any approach that relies upon intuitive guesswork or the application of modern-day 'understanding' to the archaeological record. Instead he advocates "middle-range research" into the properties of the archaeological record itself and the development of "middle-range theory". The majority of the papers in parts II and III of the book represent various applications of this "middle-range" approach: ethnoarchaeological research, taphonomic studies, multivariate statistical techniques.

It is important not to be taken in by the term "middle range". There is very little "middle" about it. The term "between" may perhaps be more appropriate, but only in the sense that middle-range research or theory is to be located between the archaeologist and that which is under study, which for Binford is the archaeological record. It certainly does not lie in the middle of other aspects of archaeological theory and link them together as, for example,

Schiffer (1988) would have us believe. The "middle-range" approach is in fact an overarching scheme that aims to explain and make explicit all aspects of the formation and interpretation of the archaeological record. While the term "middle" may lend it a spurious modesty, it is nothing less than an archaeological version of the unified field theory that has so far eluded students of physics: it seeks to explain and subsume all other theories within itself and thereby make them redundant.

Binford's own tactics in defence of "middle-range" approaches against all comers will not endear him to some. Like his all-embracing "middle-range" theory, he does not come across as a particularly modest man and some of his more bitter comments are rather cheap (see, for example, the footnote concerning Kuhn, Hodder and the concept of culture on the final page of text [p.490]). This is nevertheless an important book and a significant addition to the Binford canon. It should be read, critically but in no sense negatively; but most of all it deserves to be read by all serious students of archaeology.

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JOHN A. AGNEW AND JAMES S. DUNCAN (EDS.) *The Power of Place* Unwin Hyman. London. 1989. 231pp, illus. No price quoted. No ISBN.

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In the tradition of inquiry that asks the question what makes a house a home, this book attempts to define what makes a space a place. To this end, a selection of erudite geographers of various hue -- cultural, political and urban --, along with social historians and an anthropologist, set out in search of the intellectual importance of geographical place in the practice of social science and history. The quest results in what is touted as a celebration of the marriage between the sociological and geographical imaginations. The fruits of the search, the offspring of this union, are the twelve chapters of the *Power of Place*.

What may make this volume of interest to archaeologists are a number of themes their own discipline is coming to have in common with historical geographers and sociologists. The exegesis of the contextual meanings of specific locations, and the examination of shifting symbolic associations in relation to the spatial representation of power, may provide a methodology for archaeologists trying to advance their ideas on the meaning of site structure and location as well as interpretations of occupational histories.

The two major themes around which the chapters are woven, according to the editors, are the intellectual history of the concept of place and the interpolation of power and place. The approaches adopted for the elucidation of these themes are grouped into three main categories. The first is to examine the ways in which the social sciences in particular socio-political contexts have treated not only concepts of place, but also actual empirical cases. The second is to investigate the disciplinary history of place while focusing on one or two empirical case studies, while the third present detailed case studies of the relationships between power and place.

These case studies range from the transformation of spatial snobbery in pre- and post independence New England, to the repeatedly reformulated symbolic representations of Beijing, formerly as the celestial capital of Imperial China and latterly as the administrative centre of the People's Republic. Continuity and change in meanings associated with place are documented from Kandy in Sri Lanka, as Buddhist city and colonial base, and the towns and villas of Renaissance Italy. The associations and legitimating role of place are explored as experienced by Florentine townsmen and Andean villagers. The geographical range of examples brought together in this volume exemplify a fine balance between diversity and an underlying unified theme.