

COLONIALISM AND EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Introduction

It is difficult to talk about the relationship between archaeology and colonialism in Europe, because modern European colonialism affected the whole world. From this point of view, we could almost start and finish the book with this chapter: it would be enough to review the works and thoughts of colonial European archaeologists in Africa, Asia, America and Oceania. However, as many postcolonial scholars have noted, colonial categories for representing the Other were not only constructing an image of the conquerable subaltern, but were also fundamental in shaping European identity. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first one will deal with colonial times up to the mid-20th century, the second with the postcolonial period.

The colony: Studying Others, understanding Ourselves

The first intellectual appropriations of the Other by European states can be tracked back at least to classical times, when ancient scholars resorted to “barbarian” populations in order to build notions of “Greekness” and “Romanness” (Hall 1989; Webster 1996). With the expansion of Europe from the late 15th century onwards, the populations that the conquerors and merchants found were sometimes used as an illustration of the European past. The most renowned early application of ethnographic knowledge to the interpretation of prehistoric remains is that of Father Lafiteau (1681-1746). In his *Customs of the American Indians* (1724) he interpreted correctly the polished stone axes of Prehistoric Europe by means of ethnographic analogies. A blend of anthropology and archaeology would become common currency during the second wave of modern colonialism, from the mid-19th century onwards, and would play an important role in justifying colonial conquest and in constructing the identity of the European bourgeois classes.

Broadly speaking, two main types of colonialist/imperialist discourses can be described in archaeology for the period comprised between the mid-19th and the mid-20th century: the discourse of civilization and the discourse of origins. They were based on different archaeological remains but both were important for the definition of

European identities. The discourse of civilization was based on the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the other one in places like Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa or Oceania. Greece and Rome provided Europe with a glorious cradle of civilization, the Middle East confirmed the truth of Judeo-Christian belief and the rest of the world had a double function: it illuminated the deepest origins of Europe that were being unearthed in the 19th century and it served to reassure the bourgeois classes of the superiority, cultural as well as moral, of Western industrial civilization (Trigger 1992: 109, 141-143). It is worth remembering, however, that archaeology provided colonialism with much more than a discourse. As a field discipline, it was crucial, along with anthropology, geography, biology and geology, to produce practical knowledge of the conquered or conquerable lands and as such it is acknowledged by colonial administrators and theorists. Raffaele di Lauro (1940), an Italian fascist, wrote in his colonial handbook: “The dominant has to know well the dominated to practice his functions... Probably if war actions in Ethiopia have achieved such a remarkable success during and after the brief armed conflict, it is due to the fact that whole generations of Italians had studied the Abyssinian world widely... This methodical study has provided precious knowledge that had made the work of Italians easier”. Among the Italian scholars mentioned by di Lauro figure, as one might expect, archaeologists.

The discourse of civilization

European powers, namely Britain, Germany and France, appropriated themselves of the past of other formerly “progressive” countries. This is especially obvious in the case of Greece and the Hellenic world, including Turkey and the Levant (Bernal 1987; Morris 1994; Marchand 1996; Shanks 1996; Dietler 2005). Here the appropriation was both spiritual and practical: western European countries considered themselves the true heirs of the Greek miracle as opposed to degenerate modern Greeks or Turks, whereas foreign institutions (museums, schools and universities) dictated the agendas of archaeology, philology and historiography in the old Hellenic lands. As diplomatic institutions, foreign schools were often politically involved in the larger imperialist enterprise (Krings and Tassignon 2004). The twofold orientalist discourse (intellectual as well as material) was crudely put by a German diplomat in 1902, referring to Turkey: “The economic will follow the intellectual conquest as a natural result, and then these two diffused phases will be naturally followed by the third stage, that of political

exploitation and consolidation of the cultural values we have created” (Marchand 1996: 318).

The intellectual appropriation was especially insidious and long lasting. As Shanks (1996: 81) has noted “There is room in Hellenism for dispute over who had the strongest claim on Classical Greece, but it is generally agreed that it was the northwest Europeans”. An extreme version of the imperial control of Greekness by northern Europe was that of some German scholars, who considered that the wonders of Hellenism were in the last instance due to a northern, Aryan influence. Classical Greece was fundamental for defining national and class identities in 19th century Europe, from cultural capital (Dietler 2005) to bodily behavior (Leoussi 2001). The role of antiquities and collection in relation to imperialist and nationalist policies has been addressed by several authors (e.g. Tsignarida and Kurtz 2002; Merryman 2006). Eurocentric views have been contested by Martin Bernal (1987) in his highly controversial *Black Athena*, where the African and Oriental roots of Greece are emphasized. In any case, modern Greeks (and Turks) lie as marginal historical subjects in a no-man’s-land governed by foreign academic controversies and identity politics.

The case of Rome is somewhat different. Whereas the appropriation of Greece was mostly cultural, that of Rome was mainly political. Rome provided theoretical and practical models of colonization and offered justifications for European colonialism (Hingley 2000, 2001, 2006; Díaz-Andreu 2004; Dietler 2005: 43-45): as Roman imperialism had been eventually advantageous for those conquered, despite the violence and exploitation of the colonizing process, the civilizing mission of modern European powers was equally positive, notwithstanding its possible flaws. This was clearly stated in some scholarly publications: “The Roman Empire was the first great imperial experiment which rose above the methods of brute force or mere well-devised bureaucracy. Rome made a genuine effort to unite Liberty and Empire, and, although she ultimately failed, she offered... at least a highly interesting analogy to similar modern experiments. In particular the English historian is irresistibly reminded of the British Empire...” (Fiddes 1906: 5). The Roman Empire played another relevant role in colonialism. The presence of Roman monuments in certain lands allowed colonial powers to lay claim over those territories. This was the case with the French in Algeria and Tunis (Mattingly 1996; Picarella 2007) and the Italians in Lybia (Munzi 2004).

Egypt and the Middle East have suffered processes of intellectual expropriation with repercussions in the present day (Marchand 1996; Bahrani 1998; Said 2002;

Meskill 2003). They are the cradle of some of the cultural products that the West values most as their own, such as literacy, urbanism, statehood and Christianity. The dominant discourse had it that the true heirs of the Middle Eastern legacy were not the Arabs, but the Europeans. Furthermore, the ruins of ancient civilizations with no match in the present proved the point that the modern inhabitants of the Orient had to be controlled and re-civilized by the West. This discourse was revived by the West during both Iraq wars (Pollock and Lutz 1994; Hamilakis 2005).

The discourse of origins

The discourse of origins has had more sinister outcomes, since it denied or restricted humanity to a large proportion of the humankind. The move was inevitable after 18th century universal declarations of human rights: the only way to reconcile them with colonial exploitation was to locate the Other in a lower stage, that of the not-so-human, prehistoric savage. The discourse of origins created a divide between history and prehistory, which, in the last instance, can be attributed to Hegel. Hegel distinguished *World-History*, which is a Western history of spiritual progress based on statehood, and *Prehistory*, that is the historicity of the people without history (Guha 2002). In this group, the Orient, Africa and America are included. The archaeological invention of the concept in the mid-19th century is somewhat independent from philosophy and was firstly applied to the European past in the mid-19th century. However, it was quickly utilized in other continents to make sense not only of their past, but also of their present (McNiven and Russell 2005). The best example of this use was John Lubbock's *Pre-historic Times*, which saw several editions between 1865 and 1911. Hegelian philosophy, evolutionism, positivism and archaeology came together to produce a powerful discourse that would support colonialism for over a century.

Archaeology was also relevant for denying indigenous peoples their roots and their historical rights to the land. Whenever monuments were discovered in places where no monuments were expected due to evolutionist prejudices, from sub-Saharan Africa (Hall 1995) to Australia (Russell and McNiven 1998), they were automatically linked to superior, white populations which had supposedly occupied the land before the arrival of their current inhabitants. The strategy itself was inherent to the diffusionist paradigm, which conceived a very restricted number of creative core areas from where cultural products spread all over the world (Harris 1968: 379-383).

Colonizing the nation

When we think about the relationship between Europe and colonialism, it is invariably the aggressions against other regions that are considered. However, there has been a very important “inner colonialism” in Europe, which is linked to the consolidation of the nation-state. For the triumph of the modern nation-state, rural communities and cultural minorities had to be fully incorporated into the common project. Thus, the Bretons, Basques, Sardinians and Irish were very often the aim of colonial cultural policies (for Ireland: Bush 2006: 70-71; Hingley 2006). On the other hand, anthropologists have noted the parallelism traced by 19th century folklorists between the rural populations of Europe and the “primitives” of other continents (Hoyt 2001: 333-336). The state’s behavior with regard to minorities and rural populations was often comparable to that deployed in external colonies, but there was an unsolvable ambiguity: Peasants were ridiculed as primitives and subjected to modernizing projects, but at the same time they were considered to be the cultural repositories of the nation’s essences, inevitably corrupted in the city.

Archaeology played a pivotal role in proving the belonging of minorities to the nation-state from time immemorial: although the intellectual strategies of incorporation have been labeled nationalist (Trigger 1992), the borderline between nationalism and colonialism is blurred. Take, for example, the case of Algeria, which was considered part of France, or Angola and Mozambique, regarded as Portuguese provinces. On the other hand, a colonial language and policy was often used in Spain during the dictatorship to refer to the Catalonians and the Basques (Tomlison 1991: 76-77; Díaz-Andreu 1997). Where nationalism and imperialism are more clearly conflated is in the case of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The *Drang nach Osten* that subdued the Slavic neighbors of Germany was at the same time an explicit colonial enterprise and part of the Nazi nation building (Arnold 2005: 19-20). The involvement of archaeologists in this project is well documented (Arnold 1990, 2002; Gasche 2006): researchers tried to demonstrate through material culture that Germans had settled in most of Eastern Europe before the Slavic expansion.

The postcolonial paradox

By 1970s, most countries in the world had gained independence from European states or other colonial powers. The last wave of decolonization, however, came with the fall of communism and the dismemberment of the USSR in the early 1990s, an episode

whose archaeological repercussions are yet to be analyzed in detail. If we forget about places like Puerto Rico (Pagán-Jiménez 2004), we can say that we live in a postcolonial world today, but is this a world bereft of empires? Modern empires have disappeared, but we have postmodern ones, empires without colonies (Hardt and Negri 2000; Bush 2006: 187-215), with their own strategies of knowledge-power. Although much attention has been paid to the US (Chomsky 2003), the situation in Europe, which has been described as a cosmopolitan empire (Beck and Grande 2007: 61-62), should be scrutinized. It would be interesting, for example, to study whether different neocolonial strategies in the US and the EU are related to different modes of archaeological knowledge. In any case, it has been noted that Euro-American postcolonial discourses could be nothing else than another way of using the Other to define Western identities (Hernando 2006).

Cooperation is the crucial word in the European Empire (Beck and Grande 2007: 67): everything is done at the present time for the sake of cooperation: we help communities in other continents to recover their history—presupposing that locals are unable to address their past in a proper way. This is akin to colonial ideas that “subject cultures required management and regimes to articulate, map, and control resources, specifically their monumental past” (Meskell 2003: 151). However, people all over the world have been dealing with their past in manifold ways before western knowledge arrived, therefore, what we do most of the time is recover *their* history for *us*—so that we can make sense of them. The language of cooperation cannot avoid the uncomfortable fact that Euro-American scholars are, as always, the gatekeepers of the knowledge about the rest of the world. This is obvious in mainstream scientific literature, which is published by Euro-American presses and in English (Hamilakis 2005: 98).

Cooperation is also a word used to justify archaeological projects abroad. Meaningfully, people tend to work in their former colonies, mostly because of the greater support given by the ex-colonial states, which have all kind of political and economic stakes in those countries. Thus, British archaeologists control East Africa, French archaeologists their old West African colonies and the Maghreb, and Italians are strong in Ethiopia and Libya—cf. McEachern (1996) for the case of ethnoarchaeology. The study of current archaeological projects abroad has elicited little interest among scholars, despite their relevant implications (but see Bray and Glover 1987). They are often portrayed in nationalistic celebratory terms (e.g. Ministère 2004) and the self-

praise is often extended to colonial times (La Rosa 1986). Especially remarkable is the natural smoothness with which institutions of power-knowledge in the colony have survived to our times, without any conspicuous act of contrition or any hint of self-reflection on their former and current role. Many research institutes still bear the name they had in colonial times, often with a very colonialist flair: such as the British School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) or the Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente (IsIAO). Neocolonial attitudes have been denounced also in international agencies and institutions, governmental and non-governmental, that veil for “world heritage” (cf. Meskell 2003), but often are more concerned with facilitating exotic playgrounds for Europeans (Bush 2006: 213). Colonial ideas appear repeatedly in academia as well: colonial opinions arise when it comes to the restitution of cultural property (e.g. Boardman 2000) or the categorization of past cultures as more or less civilized, implying that those societies which have not developed urbanism, monuments or writing were (are) savages (Hamilakis 2005: 96).

One of the characteristics of modern empires is the concealment of politics, in keeping with the “end of history” announced after the fall of communism (Fukuyama 1992). Politics are reduced to identity issues (Huntington 1996), a fact which is mirrored in the social and human sciences (Meskell 2002; Kane 2003; Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005). This is especially obvious in European post-processual archaeology—and probably not by chance. Whereas Americans, in the processual tradition, are still concerned with political economy, power structures and statehood, Europeans, following post-processual trends, usually focus on culture and identity. Although both lines are somehow approaching (Stein 2005: 8), the difference is still quite clear. Compare the way in which American archaeologists study pre-Columbian empires (D’Altroy 1992; Feinman and Nicholas 2004; Covey 2006) and how the Roman and Phoenician colonization are currently understood in Europe (Mattingly 1997; van Dommelen 1997; Woolf 1998; Hingley 2005). Although intellectual traditions have an enormous weight, it is nonetheless worth noting that the interests of scholars coincide somewhat with the foreign policies of the US and EU as they are performed in the global stage: harder and interventionist the former, with a strong concern for state building, softer and cooperative the latter, with an alleged interest in social issues.

Postcolonial studies have indisputably produced a richer, more complex and nuanced vision of colonial processes (Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Gosden 2004; Stein 2005; van Dommelen 2006). However, despite van Dommelen’s reminder (2005:

115) that “cultural hegemony and economic exploitation are not two different or even opposed interpretations of colonial power, but they should rather be seen as two sides of the same coin”, the truth is that the political side of colonialism tends to be relegated in current studies of the phenomenon. This might be dangerous: by stressing fluid encounters, negotiation, hybridity, consumption, agency and creative appropriation (Webster 2001; Dietler 2005; van Dommelen 2005, 2006)—that is, culture, we take away the crudest side of colonialism—that is, politics, including political economy (Wolf 1982): asymmetrical power relations, massacres, larceny, disease, impoverishment, unequal wars, heavy taxes—and genocide (Given 2004). Surely, they are not always present in all cases of colonialism known, especially ancient ones (e.g. Dietler 2005: 55-61). Yet by overlooking politics, we run the risk of depriving the people without history of the history that hurts: the experience of daily humiliation and abuse by foreign masters.

Conclusion

Colonialism and archaeology have been close allies for two centuries. Archaeology has been crucial to construct European identities during the colonial era and it is fulfilling a similar role in the current panorama of neocolonialism. The new postcolonially-oriented archaeology has to be less self-indulgent and more critical with itself, in order to deconstruct the ongoing relationship between the discipline and power. Here are a few suggestions for producing a more radically postcolonial archaeology:

- 1) It is necessary to get rid of the condescending language of cooperation and development (González-Ruibal in press).
- 2) We must take equality seriously (Rancière 1995) and stop dreaming with impossible, idealized partnerships. As Alberto Memmi (2004: 163) recalls “partnership does not make sense except when both partners have a reasonably equal force”. It is still European archaeologists who study Africa’s past, not the other way round.
- 3) It is important to embrace politics beyond identity issues, which are often reduced to individual problems.
- 4) We have to consider ruling out some concepts deeply tainted by colonial values and Eurocentrism, such as “Prehistory” (McNiven and Russell 2005), that helps to situate contemporary indigenous communities in another time (Fabian 1983), or “historical archaeology”, which considers “historical” only what is Western World-History (Guha 2002).

- 5) A dichotomy has to be broken between conscious postcolonial scholars who analyze their discipline and researchers who tell us how the past truly was—without caring much about stakeholders, multiple voices, indigenous communities or colonialism (Langebaek 2006: 118).
- 6) Those European archaeological traditions that have not properly addressed their colonial pasts and neocolonial presents have to do it now—Germany, France and Spain, for example (but see Fernández 2001).
- 7) It is crucial to relinquish the initiative in favor of the periphery (Hamilakis 2005), which means that we have to stop speaking for the Other.

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