cussion of the questions relating to interpretation of the formation of the layers, the function of the ditches and their filling-in, etc. The dating propounded does not make such a discussion any less necessary, but we have chosen to wait for the final publication to embark on it.

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NOTES

1. To be published in Jutland Archaeological Society Publications.
2. Information on the absolute dating of the boundary between phases 2A and 2B has been supplied by Karen Høilund Nielsen, since this is not explicitly covered in her article (1987, fig. 18).

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Archaeology: Science or Politics?

An Interview with Colin Renfrew

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For several decades now archaeologists have been concerned with constituting their subject as a science. This was especially so within New Archaeology, which narrowed the gap between archaeology and the natural sciences in an attempt to lead archaeology towards objectiveness. At the same time there is an awareness that archaeology can be (and perhaps inevitably is) political. The political potential in prehistoric studies is clear in for instance explicit marxist archaeology or in the increasing interest in the past seen in many third world countries. But is any archaeology objective? Can we help but impose our personal standpoints on our research? Is archaeology science or politics? This is a central question throughout this interview with Professor Colin Renfrew.

Born 1947, Colin Renfrew was educated at Cambridge. He did his first degree in natural sciences, before he turned to his Ph.D. in archaeology. His first position was at Sheffield. Later he became professor at Southampton, until he in 1981 returned to Cambridge as Disney professor in archaeology.

Geographically his main fields of interest have been the Aegean and the Orkneys. Major themes in his work are the study of complex societies, aspects of trade, the autonomous development in Central and Northern Europe confirmed by radio carbon, and a social interpretation of megaliths.

He has all along been a central character in theoretical archaeology, and is influential far beyond Britain.

When asked who has been influential on the development of his archaeological approach, Renfrew first mentions discussions in physics classes at school about laws and the evidences for them. He was stimulated also by the teachings of Prof. Braithwaite in philosophy of science, whose ideas were similar to those of Karl Popper.

"My own theoretical framework comes from an attempt to look at society and see how one can conveniently describe it and then look for sources of change. I am influenced by modern thinking about change in many directions. Especially I think the biologists have made real progress, when they talk about morphogenesis. I think it is important deliberately not to stand apart from the developments of thought in contemporary science, where there are many useful concepts, e.g. the language of morphogenesis or of information science. I certainly looked in those directions. But they do have difficulties in coping with the role of the individual in relation to the aggregate. What happens in society is often not really the product of individual will. In aggregate human volitions end up with many unintended consequences.

In relation to the notion of evolution, I have no doubt, that there are significant similarities between the development of e.g. complex societies and the formation of new species. But it seems to me that if we are talking about the development of culture, we are not talking about genetic material, which is handed on by specific mechanisms from generation to generation. The language of science can be useful, because it has talked about some aspects of the individual versus the aggregate problem with more success than any other language. But they are not dealing effectively with human will and activities."

Renfrew has been one of the most prominent European archaeologist connected with New Archaeology.

"New Archaeology, as I see it, was a major break that took place, best described in Clarke's "A loss of innocence" (2). People realized that they had to examine the methodologies and philosophies they are working within, and had to be more explicit and more willing to define and defend those. This is New Archaeology in a broad sense. Some people have a very narrow notion of New Archaeology, exemplified by the unfortunate book by Watson, LeBlanc and Redman (3). What happened was much broader than the attempt to pour all of archaeology into that narrow view of philosophy of science.

In addition to the North Americans and the British it has been the Dutch and the Scandinavians, who have participated actively in the development of the New Archaeology. North Americans sometimes imagine that it was all an American happening, but many of the foundations were laid in Europe. If we look at archaeology in general, the underpinnings in archaeological science or excavation method, I would say that the Americans are far from pre-eminent. We are much more sophisticated in Europe, where there has been a long tradition for an archaeology that could be called scientific in various ways. So I find that Scandinavia, Holland, Britian and America participated together in the revolution of New Archaeology."

New Archaeology is more or less explicitly linked with positivism. Colin Renfrew has in some papers argued, that a positivist methodology is the only alternative to subjective or idealist analyses. And he also seems to accept the link made between positivism and capitalism: "If to pursue a positivist strategy of verification or testing is seen in some quarters as tantamount, philosophically, to upholding capitalism, then, as far as I am concerned, there are worse things which one could uphold, and worse ways of upholding them." (4)

"It is not I who have made that link. It has been used in a pejorative sense by some of these structural-marxists and others to suggest a rejection of both capitalism and Western science. I am not shocked or annoyed by being called a capitalist, but I do not think it is a relevant point. The notion that science is a capitalist product seems first of all stupid, but if it comes from a marxist it is even more so, as Karl Marx himself saw his own project as one that was eminently scientific. It so happens, that capitalism and Western science developed in the same areas. But the development of science is an attempt to produce information or knowledge systematically and to seek to verify or question it. In that statement I am not saying "I am a capitalist, so I am a scientist". Whether or not one is a capitalist is irrelevant, but one has to be a scientist, because science simply means systematic knowledge as separated from revelation."

Colin Renfrew advocates systems theory and although he does not object to the term materialist, he prefers to stress his interest in the workings of the social aspects of society (a recent collection of articles is titled "Approaches to Social Archaeology"(5)).

But does he agree that systems theory and marxist archaeology have elements in common?

"It is true, that there are many points of equivalence in the systemic framework and marxist analysis, to the extent that they are descriptive of society. But a systemic framework allows you to talk about the past without strong political preconceptions. It seems to me no formula for advanced knowledge to assume from the start what you want to know. It may be, that we cannot expect to be objective in trying to learn about the past, but I think there are risks in choosing a strong political position at the outset. It is no doubt true, that many standpoints have associated with them unconscious as well as conscious political preferences and preconceptions. But any framework that succeeds in being more value free is a better framework.

Scandinavia is one of the few regions, where Marxism has been coherently applied in archaeology and the approach does have its positive merits. The main one, I think, is that it allows you to take a fairly holistic approach, to look at the way the whole society is changing, and how changes in one aspect would affect other parts. This could easily be paraphrased in systemic terms. Secondly it focuses on social issues.

The great pitfall of marxism, I think, is the concept of contradiction. Although it is an interesting concept, that can also be expressed in systems theory (if Marx had been aware of the concept of feedback, he would have used it), it involves temporal circularity. They speak of contradictions explaining something, but when you ask for evidence, they have to make references to following events. They don't really get at what are the dynamics of change.

The problem with marxism is that it prescribes how you should tackle a problem rather than invite you to think on your own about it."

In later years there has in archaeology been an increasing interest in the symbolic aspects of society. Professor Renfrew too is concerned with the projective or symbolic subsystem, including religion, art, language and science. His inaugural lecture was titled "Towards an Archaeology of Mind"(6). What is his opinion about structuralist archaeology, and why did he in his inaugural lecture say that "the archaeology of mind is too important to leave to the structuralists alone"?

"The structuralist approach is often interesting and in some ways very productive. For instance Ian Hodder has emphasized the active role of material culture. That is a sound point. Material culture does not simply reflect other realities. Material culture is part of the reality and helps to shape itself and other realities. Some have seen material culture as a projection of other realities, a very useful perception I think. Furthermore the structuralists have contributed to archaeology in a positive way by discussing areas of human experience and areas of the archaeological record, that have been neglected somewhat in

contemporary archaeology, e.g. by New Archaeology. But I do not think these valuable points necessarily emerge from a structuralist framework, as I understand it. In the end so much seem to come down to an individual claiming to recognize and proclaiming certain categories in the world, which he then seeks to divide the world into. Prof. Gellner (7) made the sound point, that if you lock up a number of structuralists in separate cubicles, they might well come up with different categories, and where do you go from there? The approach lacks system and method, which is why I do not think the archaeology of mind should be left to the structuralists alone."

"Do you recognize any of the New Archaeology in structuralism?"

"Yes, in as far as one sees New Archaeology as an awareness of the methodologies and philosophies we employ, rather than a specific theoretical framework, then contemporary approaches are much influenced by it. I am well disposed to some of the strukturalist work, as some people overcome or bypass some of its limitations. Its merits, indeed, is that it is not purely structuralist. When these people undertake some systematic analysis, they will use a computer program, indeed often the same package as a New Archaeologist, and they employ the same critical criteria, coming to pretty much the same conclusions from the same data. The methodological sophistication in handling the data that came with New Archaeology, has happily not been thrown overboard by the various post-archaeologists."

It is a general problem that there are very few women employed in archaeology, especially in the more influential positions. This is not due to a lack of female students, who are in majority at least in the lower degrees. What causes this picture and what could be done to change it? And in relation to this, what does Professor Renfrew think of Feminist Archaeology?

"It is a real problem, but not just in archaeology or in Britain, I think. I mean, there must be a larger proportion of women in archaeology than in natural sciences. And the problem is not in the order of magnitude it used to be.

One part of the problem is that women are accepting genderdefined roles, and therefore to a large extent are not applying to do research at the Ph.D. level. That perpetuates itself at the post-doctoral level; as you know there are ludicrously few female teachers and fellows. Some colleges in Cambridge are trying to do something about it, but there are few highly qualified graduates to draw from. We might try to encourage the girls more, but whether they are able to continue is determined by the number of grants, which in turn is determined by their performance, their exams.

I think Feminist Archaeology does explore important areas. There clearly are preconceptions, and some models do contain assumptions about gender, which are very questionable. It is worth looking at the evidence, first of all from sexually determined finds.

But if Feminist Archaeology implies that people have got their solutions to the wrongs of the world in this area and are trying to impose them on archaeology, I don't think it is a good research design. I am not terribly keen on any -ism in archaeology, in the sense that I feel we should be looking at problems, rather than bringing solutions."

Throughout the above Colin Renfrew has stressed his preference for a valuefree, objective archaeological science. Does this mean that politics and science can be separated?

"There is a connection. We can not define science, including archaeology as a world apart from the real world of contemporary political thought and action. I myself regard archaeology as primarily the pursuit of knowledge, as research. The end-goal of that is information. Of course one has to choose what one wants information about. That your research questions are influenced by your political standpoint is unavoidable and not desirable to avoid. People have different poliical standpoints and are seeking to change the world in various ways. That is perfectly legitimate. But when people in that sense come to achaeology, probably already knowing the answer to a particular problem, they are very often only seeking to document that answer by means of the archaeological record.

It is true that in various areas the past and the view of the past is a very active force in discussion of the present. I fully accept that the past is of great significance, particularly in countries, for instance, where they are seeking to define their image of themselves, where it is not already fixed and defined (8). For them it is very important to establish their own identity. Each country is trying to do so and distance themselves from former colonial identify, almost inevitably a Western identity. I am very sympathetic towards that, and it represents fascinating problems. I well see that archaeology is of great significance there.

My own reason for finding archaeology interesting is more an existential one, to try and understand where we are in the world, to understand what it is to be a human being, and where we situate ourselves in the pattern of human existence in a broader way."

"What is or should be the position of Cambridge in the archaeological world?"

"In response to the postulate that the Americans were not terribly good excavators, one shocked American archaeologist once exclaimed: 'But, but... we lead the world!' I would not want to make the same claim for Cambridge. There is no a priori reason why Cambridge should be pre-eminent in any sense, although historically it has had a central role in British archaeology, and British archaeology no doubt has been influential on a wider platform. But there are now several good departments in Britain, where original thought about the methods of archaeology (not just the rather straight forward digging type) is going on. But the department at Cambridge try to have a global view, which not every department can do. We teach most areas of the world, and have many foreign students passing through. Hopefully it will continue to have that global awareness and that methodological concern, which is its hallmark. I am sure that what this department ought to be able to contribute is people who are trained and able to work in different areas, who are not just specialists in one area, and with a very strong methodological awareness. This is what Cambridge has build up to doing in the past 60 years, and if it continues to do so, then it ought to remain one of the more interesting places at a world level, where archaeologists would go to meet other archaeologists."

"How do you defend archaeology in the present day context of financial cut-downs?"

"Archaeology is increasingly seen, especially by archaeologists, as one of the major historical disciplines, and it is the one historical discipline, that allows one to take a global (chronologically and spatially) view. There is no doubt that if we are asking questions about the human species and its past, archaeology is very well placed to answer those. There are those of course, in the modern world, who are concerned only with increasing the production, the gross national product, manufacturing of goods and so on, but they aren't that numerous. Nearly every country realizes that it needs a view of its past, and even if we are talking about material production, it is understood, that productivity is determined not only by technological efficiency, but by how people look at their place in society, and at what work means to them, and how they feel about the world in general. I think archaeology has a vital role in situating one self in the world.

This is recognized by governments, not only in a university context. The growth of rescue archaeology in most parts of the world reflects an awareness by governments, that to salvage part of their nation's past is part of their responsibility. I feel quite optimistic! We should not be defensive about the role of archaeology, but should be more bold and insisting on giving it its due place among the historical disciplines and in the society as a whole."

(1) This interview took place in November 1986.

(2) DAVID CLARKE 1973: A loss of innocence. *Antiquity* 47 p. 6–18.

(3) P.J. WATSON, S.A. LEBLANC and C.L. REDMAN 1971: *Explanation in Archaeology: An explicitly scientific approach.* New York, Columbia University Press.

(4) C. RENFREW 1981: Space, Time and Man. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 6, p. 257–78.

(5) C. RENFREW 1984: *Approaches to Social Archaeology.* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

(6) C. RENFREW 1982: *Towards an Archaeology of Mind. An inaugural lecture.* Cambridge University Press.

(7) E. GELLNER 1982: What is Structuralism? In C. RENFREW, M. ROWLANDS and B. SEGRAVES (eds): *Theory and Explanation in Archaeology.* London, Academic Press.

(8) In reation to the Nordic countries one might think of the Saami and the indigenous people of Greenland.

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