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Archaeologies of Memory: An Introduction

Ruth M. Van Dyke and Susan E. Alcock

The past is everywhere. All around us lie features which, like ourselves and our thoughts, have more or less recognizable antecedents. Relics, histories, memories suffuse human experience. . . . Whether it is celebrated or rejected, attended to or ignored, the past is omnipresent. (Lowenthal 1985:xv)

In a scene that may resonate with contemporary archaeologists as uncannily familiar, a sixth century BC cuneiform tablet from Larsa, in modern Iraq, testifies to the incipient archaeological investigations of Nabonidus, king of Babylon (Schnapp 1997:13–20). The tablet describes how Nabonidus mobilized workers with picks, shovels, and baskets to excavate in sites already millennia old, seeking to recover and restore past traces of a mighty predecessor. Yet the deeds of Nabonidus offer more than an exceptionally early example of archaeological practice – the king was actively engaged in the construction of social memory.

Today, it is the accepted business of the discipline of archaeology to interpret human pasts, and in the process, to contribute to the construction of memory for contemporary societies. Although we style ourselves as participants in a fairly young academic discipline, the “fascination with the past” or “backward-looking curiosity” that gave rise to the formal practice of archaeology is not a phenomenon specific to the post-Enlightenment era. Like the Babylonian ruler Nabonidus, past peoples knowingly inhabited landscapes that were palimpsests of previous occupations. Sites were built on sites; landscapes were occupied and reoccupied time and again. Rarely was this a meaningless or innocent reuse. Like us, past peoples observed and interpreted traces of more distant pasts to serve the needs and interests of their present lives.

This collection of essays is intended to explore these uses “of the past in the past” from a wide range of archaeological perspectives. The papers that follow are drawn from a spectrum of cultures and chronological periods: from prehistoric to early modern times, from the American Southwest to southern India. The peoples involved in each case study accessed the past through different means, employing varying combinations of texts, oral traditions, iconographic representations, heirlooms, and visible remains on the landscape.

In spite of this diversity, the papers share certain common themes. All engage with *social memory*, the construction of a collective notion (not an individual belief) about the way things were in the past (Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1975 [1925], 1992 [1950]; Hutton 1993). Social memory is nowhere here perceived as monolithic, but as variable by gender, ethnicity, class, religion or other salient factors, allowing for a multiplicity, and possible conflict, of memories in any society. Also central to the volume is the acceptance of social memory's mutability, the recognition that it emerges and evolves from acts of both remembering and forgetting. Investigating the pressures and desires behind those acts became a chief task for all the book's authors. Finally, the essays are committed to the notion that archaeology, and in some cases *only* archaeology, can do much to illuminate how people in the past conceived their past, and perceived their present and future.

In some senses, this volume is leaping onto a well-established bandwagon. Memory currently possesses a robust hold on the scholarly imagination, a development traced back by some to Sigmund Freud (1966–74 [1914]) and his interest in uncovering childhood events during psychoanalysis. In 1925, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1975 [1925]) moved the discussion of memory beyond the bounds of the individual and the personal, arguing instead that memory must be taken as a social, or group phenomenon. Since Halbwachs' death in World War II, memory has only gained ground as a topic of discourse in popular culture and literature, accelerating especially as the twentieth century drew to a close. Part of this can no doubt be related to the self-reflective frame of mind that characterized the end of the millennium. Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1996), for example, dissected the relationships between Western cultural values and our visions of the natural world. Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, published between 1913 and 1927 and so often taken as "the" novel about memory, was released as a film (*Le Temps retrouvé*) in 1999 (see Bradley, this volume); the 2000 film *Memento* in turn explored the role of memory in the construction of reality. Two recent issues of the interdisciplinary journal *Representations* have been devoted to memory in history and the social sciences (see Davis and Starn 1989; Laqueur 2000). Genealogy sites proliferate on the internet as disenfranchised or dislocated suburban Americans seek their family roots. Cultural critics have noted the flowering of a post-modern nostalgia for an imagined simpler past (e.g., Nora 1989). Innumerable other examples of a western near-obsession with memory and with wars over memory could be cited, from Holocaust commemoration, to the display of the Enola Gay, to the ongoing debate over memorializing the events of 9/11 (e.g., Baer 2000; Linenthal and Englehardt 1996; Zerubavel 1995).

Where have archaeologists stood in all of this? Obviously, they have been directly pulled into museum controversies or arguments over the role of heritage management; they have been actors in the recovery of lost objects (or human remains), such as the work of forensic archaeology on the "disappeared" of Argentina (Crossland 2000). Other authors, notably David Lowenthal (1985), have considered the unique, and uniquely complex, contributions of archaeology to accessing the past. Archaeologists have also joined with historians and social scientists in recognizing the potential of memory to illuminate the pasts of marginalized groups (Alonso 1988; Blight 2001). Memory has been "claimed by the heretofore silenced and oppressed as the

gateway to a past that history had closed” (Laqueur 2000:1). To that end, explicit attention has been paid to the juxtaposition of present-day oral narratives with archaeological epistemologies (e.g., Echo-Hawk 2000; Mason 2000). Finally, the role of archaeology in commemorative manipulations in aid of nationalist or other political agenda has been scrutinized, and often condemned (Arnold 1990; Bender 1998; Dietler 1998; Gero and Root 1990; Trigger 1984).

Given the backward-looking nature of the archaeological enterprise, it is hardly surprising that memory should increasingly form a focus for our attention, and from many directions. This collection concentrates upon one particular domain – the awareness and construction of the past in the past. Although this arena of inquiry has been somewhat slower to emerge than concern over the uses of archaeology in the present, there is a growing body of literature on memory and the past in archaeological contexts (e.g., Alcock 2002; Bradley and Williams 1998; Chesson 2001; Joyce and Gillespie 2000; Lillios 1999; Meskell 2001). Peoples in the past shared memories too – memories that archaeologists have the potential to recover and consider, if sometimes only in partial or shadowy form.

Social Memory in Archaeological Contexts

“Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions . . .” (Lowenthal 1985:210). People remember or forget the past according to the needs of the present, and social memory is an active and ongoing process. The construction of social memory can involve direct connections to ancestors in a remembered past, or it can involve more general links to a vague mythological antiquity, often based on the re-interpretation of monuments or landscapes (Gosden and Lock 1998; Meskell, this volume). Obliteration of the past rather than connection to it may also be involved, as pasts may be subsumed and dominated, conquered and dismantled (Manning 1998; Papalexandrou, this volume).

The construction of memory can symbolically smooth over ruptures, creating the appearance of a seamless social whole. Social memory is often used to naturalize or legitimate authority (e.g., Alcock 2002; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Jonker 1995). “Collective memory . . . is one of the great stakes of developed and developing societies, of dominated and dominating classes, all of them struggling for power or for life, for survival and advancement” (Le Goff 1992:97–8, cited in Laqueur 2000:2). A related and common use of social memory is to create and support a sense of individual and community identity (Basso 1996; Blake 1998). Although in archaeological contexts it is easiest to see the top-down machinations of elite groups using memory to these ends, memory is also employed in the service of resistance. However, these processes are not straightforward, simple, or monolithic. Memory’s mutability makes it possible for multiple and conflicting versions of events to co-exist, sometimes in the interests of competing parties (Alonso 1988).

All in all, it is clear that the creation and re-creation of social memory is an active and ongoing process . . . yet how does that process work? Anthropologists and archaeologists have offered various categories of practice. Rowlands (1993) makes an archae-

ologically useful distinction between inscribed memory practices, characterized by repetition and public access, and incorporated memory practices, characterized by opaque symbolism and secrecy. Inscribed memory is manifested in materially visible commemorative activities such as the construction of monuments, whereas incorporated memory lends itself to oblitative or fleeting acts that leave few archaeological traces (Bradley 2000:157–8). In his influential work *How Societies Remember* (1989), Connerton distinguishes between inscribed memory, involving monuments, texts and representations, and embodied memory, encompassing bodily rituals and behavior. Similar distinctions between prescriptive, formulaic, repetitive, and materially visible acts on the one hand, and performative, mutable, transitory behavior on the other, have been made by Bloch (1985) and Sahlins (1985).

It is easiest for archaeologists to access the inscribed, material end of the spectrum of memory practices. Although embodied, performative, incorporated practices are more difficult to study archaeologically, we do see “footprints” left by these activities. We possess four broad, overlapping categories of materially accessible media through which social memories are commonly constructed and observed: ritual behaviors, narratives, objects and representations, and places. To some extent, all of these are elements in the papers to follow, although the last two categories engage the most attention.

Ritual behavior is materially visible through evidence for activities such as processions, mortuary treatments, abandonments, feasting, and votive deposition, although untangling the relationship of such behavior to commemorative patterns can be challenging. Avenues, tracks, and cursuses enable the re-enactment of prehistoric movements that in some cases may have involved ritual processions (Barclay and Harding 1999; Barrett 1994; Roney 1992; Tilley 1994:173–200). Mortuary practices, long of great interest to archaeologists, are a growing venue for memory studies (e.g., Barrett 1988; Chesson 2001; Jonker 1995; Kuijt 1996). Some of the most visible commemorative ritual activities revolve around veneration of ancestors (Chang 1983:33–43; McEnany 1995). Many of the authors in this volume deal with commemoration of the dead in some form or another. Humans are not the only recipients of ritual treatment after their passing; in the American Southwest, Walker (1995) interprets the intentional conflagration of structures and the deposition of votive objects just prior to abandonment as evidence for rituals of closure. Cult activities such as feasting (Hamilakis 1999; Prent, this volume; Toll 1985) and votive deposition (Bradley 1990) often have to do with the celebration of memory. Despite the destructive intentions of prehistoric actors who set fire to buildings and tossed bronze objects into the Thames, such activities have left us with intriguing and interpretable archaeological traces.

Narratives, stories or other forms of information about the past, may be transmitted onwards either in oral traditions or as more fixed textual accounts. A number of the authors in this volume are working, to some degree, with the benefit of textual information. The written word, of course, has many alluring qualities: it seems secure and reliable. Yet it is important to bear in mind that texts, especially in the pre-modern societies discussed here, are the work of a certain class of people – normally elite, educated, wealthy, and politically invested – with resulting particular agendas and

biases. This undeniable fact, of course, makes archaeological investigation all the more attractive, and essential, for studying the past of the marginalized, the resistant, the non-literate.

Representations and *objects* include such items as paintings, masks, figurines, rock art, and other representational media that often possess commemorative functions. Rock art panels, for example, may depict ancient mythic events while locating them on the landscape (Bradley 1997; Taçon 1999). Human bones may have been treated as commemorative objects in some Neolithic European settings (e.g., Barrett 1988). Objects provide graphic but non-linguistic access to the past (Rowlands 1993:144). Following Kopytoff (1986), objects are acknowledged to have life-histories that may be traced to illuminate the variable constructions of memory (Lillios 1999; Walker 1999). Portable objects lend themselves well to purposes of remembering, as well as forgetting (Lillios, this volume). A frequently cited example of the latter is the destruction of carved *malangan* images in mortuary contexts as part of a process of forgetting (Küchler 1993).

Finally, all of the authors in this volume deal, in one way or another, with commemorative *places*. Places are spaces that have been inscribed with meaning, usually as a result of some past event or attachment. Here, this broad category encompasses monuments, landscapes, natural features, buildings, tombs, trees, obelisks, shrines, mountain peaks, and caves (e.g., Alcock 2001; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Blake 1998; Bradley 1998, 2000; Brady and Ashmore 1999; Holtorf 1998; Williams 1998).

Place, Memory and Phenomenology

Memory is closely integrated with place in the work of major theorists such as Bachelard (1964), Casey (1987), de Certeau (1984) and Nora (1989). Places, meanings, and memories are intertwined to create what some authors have termed a “sense of place” (e.g., Feld and Basso 1996). A sense of place rests upon, and reconstructs, a history of social engagement with the landscape, and is thus inextricably bound up with remembrance, and with time; its construction is tied into networks of associations and memories through a process Basso (1996:107) calls interanimation. As humans create, modify, and move through a spatial milieu, the mediation between spatial experience and perception reflexively creates, legitimates, and reinforces social relationships and ideas. Influential treatments of these ideas include Bourdieu (1977), Foucault (1977) Giddens (1984), Harvey (1989), Lefebvre (1991), and Soja (1996). The recursive role of space in the production of society has, of course, been explored in a number of disciplines (e.g., Cosgrove 1984; Davis 1990; Duncan and Ley 1993; Morphy 1995; Zukin 1991), not least in archaeology (e.g., Bender 1993; Edmonds 1999; Glassie 1975; Miller 1984; Pearson and Richards 1994; Smith and David 1995).

The experiential nature of place provides one starting point to retrieve social memory; this perhaps becomes especially vital in prehistoric studies. Although many culturally-specific contextual meanings can never be known, a *phenomenological* approach in archaeology such as that espoused by Gosden (1994), Thomas (1996) and Tilley (1994) allows us to think about the ways in which landscapes and built forms

were experienced, perceived, and represented by ancient subjects, working from the starting point of a contemporary body in the same space. Place, above all, is a sensual experience, with the body, social identity, and shifting perceptions of society intersecting through daily, lived spatial experiences. Lawrence Durrell captures the way in which memory is embedded in daily, lived encounters with place in the following passage from *The Alexandria Quartet* (1960), in which he describes a character's return to the Egyptian city:

Alexandria, capital of memory! How long had I been away? . . . Once one had left the semi-circle of the harbour nothing had changed whatsoever. The little tin tram groaned and wriggled along its rusty rails, curving down those familiar streets which spread on either side of me images which were absolute in their fidelity to my memories. The barbers' shops with their fly-nets drawn across the door, tingling with coloured beads: the cafés with their idlers squatting at the tin tables (by El Bab, still the crumbling wall and the very table where we had sat motionless, weighed down by the blue dusk). . . . Walking down with remembered grooves of streets which extended on every side, radiating out like the arms of a starfish from the axis of its founder's tomb. Footfalls echoing in the memory, forgotten scenes and conversations springing up at me from the walls, the café tables, the shuttered rooms with cracked and peeling ceilings. Alexandria, princess and whore . . . I could feel the ambience of the city on me once more, its etiolated beauties spreading their tentacles out to grasp at my sleeve. (Durrell 1960:11, 31–2, 63–4)

Durrell's rich description privileges the visual re-encounter with Alexandria, and certainly visual experiences are key to the experience of place and landscape, from the ashlar masonry of Crete (Prent, this volume) to the dramatic landforms of the American Southwest (Van Dyke, this volume) or Australia (Taçon 1999). However, Thomas (1993) points out that contemporary archaeologists also tend to privilege the visual over other ways – such as smells and tastes – of recognizing and remembering the past. Proust's madeleine is a famous case in point. Attempts are increasingly being made to reconstruct sounds, textures, tastes, and smells from archaeological contexts (e.g., Hamilakis 1999; Houston and Taube 2000; MacGregor 1999; Watson and Keating 1999). Emotions and emotional attachments to particular places are also obviously implicated in the construction of memory, and are increasingly sought by anthropologists and archaeologists (Altman and Low 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1994; Tarlow 1997). In the Durrell quotation above, for example, the character's response to Alexandria is colored by memories of a past love affair. Not surprisingly, emotionally charged places – ranging from the predictable (a tomb, a shrine) to the unexpected (a rock, a tree) – are frequent candidates for commemorative appropriation and transformation.

An Overview of the Volume

If social memory can be traced, if in some instances only faintly, through the media of ritual behavior, texts, representations, and places, what good does that do us? What can we learn from this study of past decisions and developments, allegiances and

antagonisms? These questions are probably best answered by demonstration, and we can now turn to a review of the papers presented in this collection. These play out – in very different settings and with very different forms of evidence – the twists and turns of social memory; together, they also offer an instructive overview into current archaeological approaches to tracing commemorative activity and its meanings.

With such a temporally and geographically diverse collection of case studies, the “order” of papers could have taken many, equally legitimate, forms. To one extent or another, all papers engage with the twin, inter-related themes of authority and identity, and the role memory plays in their creation, defense and possible transformation. The question of the definition and protection of elite groups is another widely shared element, particularly in the contributions of Meskell, Prent, and Van Dyke. Certain papers (e.g., Pauketat and Alt; Sinopoli) explore the invention of a past “common” to people of diverse backgrounds, while other appeals to antiquity were more exclusionary in nature (e.g., Lillios; Papalexandrou; Prent). Finally, the papers elaborate upon the changing character of social memory, arguing profoundly against any static understanding of the memorial power of artifact or of place (e.g., Blake; Joyce; Meskell; Papalexandrou).

The full spectrum of media reviewed above – ritual behavior, narrative, representations and objects, and place – is, at one point or another, used in this volume to access social memory in the past. The use of objects, or artifacts, in memorialization is most clearly demonstrated by Lillios and Joyce. In this particular collection, as noted above, the concept of place (taken in its broadest sense) is most frequently invoked to discuss trajectories of commemoration. The concept here includes the veneration of antique sites or features (e.g., Sinopoli; Van Dyke): whether they understood what they were or not (Meskell), whether they were “mere fragments” or not (Papalexandrou).

One basic division, however, does separate those studies which could draw on written evidence or literary testimonia (if only indirectly or partially) and those which could not. To that end, the case studies are organized into two broad groups: first, those working within the framework of literate societies (Sinopoli; Meskell; Papalexandrou; Prent; and Joyce); and then those within genuinely prehistoric contexts (Lillios; Pauketat and Alt; Van Dyke). This is not to claim that texts “solve” all our problems – far from it – but they unquestionably grant some richness and nuance to the relevant analyses. Organizing the papers in this fashion allows readers, if they wish, to sample that richness in order to illuminate, and complicate, the necessarily “barer bones” of the prehistoric case studies.

This particular line-up moves us forward and backward in time, crisscrossing from the Old World to the New. We begin with Carla Sinopoli’s investigation of the multi-faceted construction of legitimacy and authority in Vijayanagara, an early modern state in southern India. Over three centuries, the rulers of Vijayanagara consolidated a wide area containing diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and occupational groups. They succeeded, in part, through emphasizing associations with past sacred mythic events, not least the Ramayana epic. In addition, Vijayanagara temple architecture imitated the forms of the older, Chola empire to suggest strains of legitimate continuity. After the decline of Vijayanagara, the ancient state and its monuments themselves became

fodder for constructed memories used to validate the governments of subsequent, smaller kingdoms.

The deep palimpsest that is the Egyptian landscape provides fertile territory for Lynn Meskell to explore memory at two discrete moments in the past. At Deir el Medina, on the west bank of the Nile, Meskell finds evidence for both short-term commemorative practices and long term memorialization. During the New Kingdom occupation of the site as a worker's village, connections with immediate ancestors and with deceased historical figures are evidenced by house design and contents, by stelae, statuary, and texts, and festivals were settings for a variety of mnemonic activities. In the much later Roman period, Deir el Medina was used as a burial place for elites who sought to associate themselves with an unknown but presumably glorious past – revealing their own particular imagining of the site's prior history.

Architecture is the focus of Amy Papalexandrou's study in Byzantine Greece, where *spolia* – fragments of ancient masonry and tombstones – were included as decorative elements in the facades of medieval buildings. The use of *spolia* both celebrated and neutralized Greek antiquity, connecting Byzantine administrators with a remarkable (and pagan) Greek past which was now dismantled and under Christian control. Some *spolia* contain inscriptions and are themselves written records, providing intriguing examples of Connerton's inscribed and incorporated memory practices. The incorporation of ancient Greek inscriptions would speak to Greek viewers recognizing (however imperfectly) their own language, while simultaneously excluding those who could not understand.

Mieke Prent examines the relationships between early Iron Age Crete and its Bronze Age past. Monumental Bronze Age ashlar structures found at a number of Cretan sites contain evidence – such as votives, animal bones, and cauldrons – for open-air Iron Age cult activities. Prent contends that members of an Iron Age warrior aristocracy associated themselves with the glories of the past by destroying wealth and engaging in ritual feasting at dramatic Bronze Age locations. Some of these activities took place in harbor sites, where the participation of foreign visitors may have added to the prestigious nature of the ritual events.

Rosemary Joyce begins an investigation into memory among the Classic Maya using contemporary psychological insights that parallel and reference the commemorative/embodied memory distinction made by Connerton (1989). She focuses on objects such as ear spools that were inscribed with text, thereby linking bodily practices with histories. These inscribed objects, visible only to certain individuals at certain times, would have cued implicit memories among restricted social groups over generations. In addition, the circulation of curated or rediscovered objects contributed to the creation of disjunctive, generalized connections to the distant past.

Although our prehistoric authors lack the rich detail provided by texts, they successfully argue, using artifacts and architecture, that memory was integral to the construction of authority and identity in prehistoric contexts. Katina Lillios investigates engraved slate plaques found in burials in Neolithic and Copper Age Iberia between 3,000 and 2,500 BC. The plaques, she argues, were used as mnemonic devices to transmit genealogical information. The plaques appear to have reinforced social differences, as not everyone was memorialized in this way, and plaques were placed out of public

view inside tombs. Reuse and destruction of some plaques over time suggests changes in social relationships and in the uses of memory.

Tim Pauketat and Susan Alt examine the prehistoric construction of earthworks, such as Cahokia, in the Mississippi valley of the southeastern United States between 1,000 and 1,200 AD. Large four-sided and pyramidal mounds generally have been held to represent shared belief systems within a context of social hierarchy. However, the microscale evidence for construction suggests these mounds were created in multiple series of building episodes by disparate peoples with diverse interests. The Mississippian mounds represent the negotiation of identity as well as authority, with mound making, in part, an appeal to a real or imagined common past.

Ruth Van Dyke investigates the role of memory in fashioning the large-scale masonry architecture at Chacoan sites in the American Southwest between 850 and 1,150 AD. Here, landscape and architecture referenced the past as one way to legitimate social authority and to create a sense of community identity. The great kiva, a built form used hundreds of years before the Chacoan era, was revived and formally incorporated within new buildings. Artificial trash mounds suggested lengthy occupations for new buildings, and road segments tied old and new structures inextricably together.

We conclude the volume with a cautionary tale followed by commentary. Emma Blake's study of the Byzantine reuse of Neolithic hypogea should be heeded by archaeologists concerned with the interpretation of social memory. At Pantalica on Sicily, it would seem logical to assume that Byzantine residents moved into Bronze and Iron Age rock-cut tombs to consolidate communal identity or to evoke connections with a respected past. After a careful examination of this phenomenon, however, Blake concludes that the Byzantine occupants – far from aligning themselves with the past – were actually moving in step with contemporary, pan-Mediterranean trends. At Pantalica, Blake asserts, “retreating into the embodiment of the local past was in fact a gesture of cosmopolitanism.” Finally, at the end of this odyssey, we offer commentary by Richard Bradley, a pioneering influence in the study of “the past in the past.” Bradley recaps the volume and returns us safely to the twentieth century and the generative musings of Marcel Proust.

This wide-ranging collection unquestionably will serve to raise still more questions about the archaeological study of memory, while leaving others yet unanswered. Not all volume contributors would agree with the concepts we have outlined in this introduction. All are united, however, by the contention that investigations into memory are a provocative and necessary contribution to contemporary archaeological dialogue. The archaeological study of memory is in its relatively early days; this volume is dedicated to airing out both its undoubted problems and its infinite possibilities.

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