Between Dirt and Discussion

Methods, Methodology, and Interpretation in Historical Archaeology

Edited by Steven N. Archer and Kevin M. Bartoy
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PREFACE

This volume originated with a session entitled “Methodology in Historical Archaeology: Current Research and Critical Perspectives” organized for the 2004 meetings of the Society for Historical Archaeology in Saint Louis, Missouri. We would like to thank the original participants in that session, many of whom graciously elaborated their papers as chapters for this volume. Adrian Praetzellis and Fraser Neiman were thoughtful discussants in the session and we thank them for their insightful comments, which prompted some of our thinking on the need for a critical revisiting of methodology within historical archaeology. We all use methods, of course, but few of us question the “whys” and “hows” often enough.

We hope that the readers of this volume glean a sense of the same renewed appreciation for complexities and potentialities of materials and materiality that we have in working on the book and thinking through the issue of methodology and its curious status within the institutional structures of archaeology. Indeed, we offer no definitive answers, but hopefully a renewed perspective on “materiality,” both as the “stuff” we excavate and the archaeological record we generate and revisit as we weave structures of narrative about the past.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to many individuals for intellectual influence as well as institutional and moral support during the preparation of this volume.

Steve Archer would like to thank the entire staff of Colonial Williamsburg’s Department of Archaeological Research, but particularly Marley Brown, Andy Edwards, and Joanne Bowen for continuous support of my own work, and for supporting methodological innovation and experimentation generally at Colonial Williamsburg. Jim Bowers and Tony Herrmann are terrific volunteers whose enthusiastic dedication to the Environmental Archaeology labs at Colonial Williamsburg greatly helped in
freeing up time for me to work on this volume. Christine Hastorf at the University of California at Berkeley has been tirelessly supportive of my work and influential on my thinking. John Speth and Richard Ford of the University of Michigan provided me with early encouragement and the foundational knowledge of archaeology and archaeological method I appreciate more with each passing year. My family, friends, colleagues and students are too numerous to name but cannot go without a general, and unjustly brief, thanks for all kinds of support in both personal and professional spheres. Kevin Bartoy is a kindred spirit and our friendship that (sometimes inexplicably) endures and strengthens our collaboration is one of the great pleasures in life.

Kevin Bartoy would also like to thank the staff of Colonial Williamsburg’s Department of Archaeological Research, particularly Marley Brown and Andy Edwards. Their tireless support for innovation in archaeology has allowed for numerous trials, errors, and, hopefully, some insights. Pacific Legacy, Inc. and, particularly, John Holson have provided tremendous enthusiasm and funding for this project. I also owe an enormous debt to Jon Erlandson and Madonna Moss of the University of Oregon, who ushered me in to the world of archaeology and instilled in me a strong material-driven perspective as well as a crucial emphasis on the importance of conservation archaeology. I am truly honored to consider Jon Erlandson a mentor and a friend. Joanne Mack of the University of Notre Dame also deserves a great deal of credit for allowing me free rein to explore and study historical archaeology as part of her Klamath River projects. Finally, I wish to thank my beautiful wife, Jenny, my family, and my friends, particularly Paolo Pellegatti, Erika Radewagen, and Kari Jones. I have been privileged to study, explore, debate, and laugh with my colleague, collaborator, and dear friend, Steve Archer.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Considering methods and methodology in historical archaeology

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“There is no right way of digging, but there are plenty of wrong ways.”

-Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1954:2)

In trying to address the historical roots and current trends concerning methods and methodology in historical archaeology, we were quickly struck by a lack of discussion in either the literature or even colloquially amongst practitioners of the discipline. Historical archaeology has been dominated by theoretical debates (e.g., Funari et al., 1999; Leone, 1995; Leone et al., 1987; McGuire and Wurst, 2002; Wilkie and Bartoy, 2000) and debates concerning disciplinary identity (e.g., Cotter, 1978 [1958]; Fontana, 1965; Griffin, 1978 [1958]; Harrington, 1955; Noël Hume, 1969; Schuyler, 1970) with little attention to the actual methods and methodology through which we create the data upon which interpretations are built. Theoretical debates endlessly probe the prevailing philosophical concepts that guide how we conceptualize the machinations of the lived past and the relationship of said past to the interpretive present (e.g., Binford, 1988a, 1988b; Hodder, 1985,