

ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY

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Ethnoarchaeology is one of the discrete subfields within archaeology, about which there are nearly as many introductory articles as there are substantive studies. Each ethnoarchaeological study has either explicitly redefined the field, or else by its own nature served to broaden the compass of what can be considered ethnoarchaeology. As a theme for this issue, ethnoarchaeology was considered broadly as "the use of ethnographic methods and information to aid in the interpretation and explanation of archaeological data" (Stiles 1977:88).

In assembling the thematic contributions to this issue, there were three primary objects:

1. To illustrate the wide range of possible approaches to the field.
2. To publish papers dealing with work, in most cases actively in progress, which was not well-known, or had not yet received general archaeological exposure.
3. To focus on work which was explicitly archaeological in intent, aimed at developing observational or analytical methodology or interpretive theory, or contributing to the understanding of a particular body of archaeological data.

The first two papers, by Roger Cribb and Glynis Jones, provide concise examples of how ethnoarchaeological studies, where the link between behaviour and its archaeologically relevant 'by-products' can be observed, can be used to investigate the methodology by which we give meaning to the archaeological record. In Cribb's study, regular patterning in the deposition of refuse in nomad campsites is identified and an analytical unit, the 'domestic complex', is defined. The latter is not proposed as a prescriptive generalisation about the organisation of space in all nomad camps, but rather as an interpretive model, from which expectations concerning the organisation of material in the archaeological record can be derived. Jones' paper addresses a particular problem in archaeobotanical studies, the identification of crop-processing stages. An ethnoarchaeological approach here allows the identification of appropriate, archaeologically measurable variables, as well as useful analytical procedures. Such an analysis could be conducted in its own right, or as one step in identifying the status or context of particular archaeological data, thereby serving better to define the potential relevance of the original data to other questions which may be asked concerning crop husbandry.

The paper by Françoise Hivernel presents both a methodology and a case study exemplifying it. Archaeologists often discuss the development or application of alternative models, but ethnoarchaeological models are usually developed or applied in isolation. Hivernel's use of several models, drawn from the observation of functioning systems in similar ecological circumstances, serves to highlight the complexity of actual behaviour (generally under-emphasised in models generated from observations on a single culture), and makes the point that alternative models need not be drastically contrasting models. The case study illustrates some of the difficulties inherent in comparing behavioural models with archaeological observations.

The papers by Sander van der Leeuw and Todd Whitelaw are concerned

with the use of ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological data to construct archaeologically relevant interpretive theory. In van der Leeuw's paper, the need for archaeologists to conduct ethnoarchaeological investigations themselves, to collect the kind of information relevant to the questions archaeologists ask of their data, is forcefully argued. The study takes as its aim the investigation of pottery-production systems in northwest Europe in the Roman period, through a focus on decision making and behaviour within types of situations, rather than within a specific context. The value of such an approach is demonstrated through the presentation of information relevant to the archaeological questions, from a pilot study of contemporary pottery making in the Philippines.

Whitelaw's paper is aimed at developing general propositions concerning the way individuals organise space in settlements, of relevance in specific archaeological interpretation, as well as in exploring the types of inferences we can make from archaeological data. An argument of general relevance is first constructed from detailed ethnoarchaeological data available for a single culture, and then put in context by a consideration of a wider, but less detailed, body of ethnographic data.

The final paper, by Chris Evans, while focussing on ethnoarchaeological observations on contemporary transhumant pastoralists, documents these as but part of the latest phase in the sequence of human settlement of a particular valley system. In this way, it contributes to our understanding of the documented and possible exploitation of the specific region, as well as recording a particular type of adaptation in a 'rescue' context.

In organising this issue, a considerable amount of interest was elicited, and it is hoped that several papers which were invited, but for various reasons could not be presented, will appear in future issues. To provide a wider perspective, a number of book reviews in this issue are devoted to major ethnoarchaeological studies. Again, several others will appear in the next issue.

In this issue ARC also inaugurates its General Perspectives section. Suzanne Bailey and Chris Scarre present a basic guide to the law, for archaeologists, while Gina Barnes explores some of the complexities of the concept of social stratification. The editors would like to re-emphasise their interest in papers submitted for publication, either on a specified issue theme, or for inclusion in General Perspectives. Likewise, the editors welcome comments and shorter contributions for Commentary, devoted in this issue to discussion of points following on from previous issues.

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Reference

- Stiles, D. 1977 Ethnoarchaeology: a discussion of methods and applications. Man 12:87-103.