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## Some Suggestions Concerning Archaeologic Records and Archaeologic Cultures

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JIRÍ NEUSTUPNÝ  
SOME SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING ARCHAEOLOGIC  
RECORDS AND ARCHAEOLOGIC CULTURES

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, especially by historians, prehistory is reproached with being too far in the bonds of factology, with making full use of all the available methods of research without caring about the theoretic motivation for their application. In fact, so far, prehistory can boast of very few theoretical works.<sup>1</sup> The rapid development of prehistory in the last decades and the urging demand that this branch of science should provide the lacking picture of primeval history, stimulated the factologic elaboration of the material, while the theoretic principles were either lagging behind or even passed over in silence. Generally it was only through tradition that the theory, methodology and methodics of prehistory have been handed down, it was the communication of experiences in the educational establishments, laboratories and studies of this branch of science. In this respect we are still far behind and it is our duty to devote more of our time to theoretic problems than we did therefore. It is imperative that the theory should not be abandoned to the uncertain ways of tradition, but elaborated

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<sup>1</sup> From among the universal recent works I mention at least some of the best known in which also further special literature is quoted: V. G. Childe, *Archaeology as a social science*. Inaugural Lecture. 3rd Annual Report, 1946, London University, Institute of Archaeology, London 1947. — V. G. Childe, *Piecing together the Past*. The Interpretation of Archaeological Data, London 1956. — G. Clark, *Archaeology and Society*, London 1947. — A. V. Arcichovskij, *Archeologija*, "Bol'saja sovětskaja enciklopedija", 3, Moskva 1950. — C. F. C. Hawkes, *British Prehistory half-way through the Century*. Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 1951. — C. F. C. Hawkes, *Archaeological Theory and Method: Some Suggestions from the Old World*, "American Anthropologist", Vol. 56—1954, No. 2, Part 1, pp. 155 ff. — J. G. D. Clark, *The Study of Prehistory*. An Inaugural Lecture, Cambridge 1954. — S. J. De Laet, *L'Archéologie et ses problèmes*, Bruxelles 1954. — "Current Anthropology". A Supplement to Anthropology Today. (Edited by William L. Thomas Jr.); Jiří Neustupný, *K metodám archeologické práce (Aux méthodes du travail archéologique)*, "Časopis Národního Musea" CXXVI — 1957, pp. 48—75.

in our literature to make its universal discussion and critical examination possible. The theory of prehistory must rise to such a level as to be able to control the factologic work and to lead it successfully to further objectives.

Of late also Włodzimierz Antoniewicz published a special paper in which he directed his attention to the theory and the methods of prehistory.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore that I have selected this modest contribution to the mentioned problems for the Antoniewicz volume, in which the Polish and the foreign prehistory renders homage to his work in this branch of science and expresses the hope for further fruitful impulses from his pen.

#### THE ANONYMOUS AND COLLECTIVE CHARACTER OF ARCHAEOLOGIC RECORDS

Prehistoric archaeologic records are considered to be anonymous and collective. They are called anonymous as we do not know their creators (producers) with the exception of marked or through their style easily recognizable imports assignable to a safely known workshop from a milieu already fully known through written records. They are considered collective as they are without any individual features, as they illustrate rather the life of a group than that of the individuals forming it. Graham Clark pointed out that anonymous prehistory can not acquire any true notion of the moral and psychologic problems of the single individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Though it is necessary to admit that archaeological records are in their character anonymous, it is yet possible to hesitate at the interpretation that they are generally and without exception collective, do not show any inclination towards individuality. As soon as there will be large numbers of finds from settlements at our disposal, finds elaborated from all points of view (shape, ornamentation, technology), then it will be possible to recognize smaller individual production areas within the ramifications of the various archaeologic cultures and, in particularly favourable cases, certain workshops from which certain special series of products had come. Thus, at least in some cases, we come from the wide collectivity to the recognition of individual contributions to the common collective production and style.

<sup>2</sup> Wł. Antoniewicz i Z. Wartolowska, *Archeologia, jej cele i zadania*. "Dawna kultura" 3—4, Wrocław 1955.

<sup>3</sup> The Economic Approach to Prehistory, "Proceedings of the British Academy", Vol. XXXIX, p. 217, London 1953.

## THE RELIABILITY OF ARCHAEOLOGIC RECORDS

The anonymity of prehistoric archaeologic records is universal and concerns the producer, distributor and even the consumer of the various products. This anonymity lies in the nature of these records, is not intended, does not hide anything permitting to doubt their reliability. Prehistoric archaeologic records are products which served the common needs of society at that time: equipment, implements, weapons, ornaments, etc. produced so as to meet the then existing real necessities. They were not produced to persuade or influence contemporaries in a certain way or to deceive them intentionally. So much the less reason to suppose that these records had been adjusted, so as to exert influence on the future generations in their conception of the past.

In the first place this concerns the finds from prehistoric settlements: their destination for use in common life proves their absolute reliability as sources of information. The same must be said of mortuary offerings, as far as they had been serviceable objects which belonged to the household goods of the defunct or had been given to him by the survivors. As to symbolic objects (either miniatures or objects made of unsuitable materials) which were not and could not have been put to any practical use, it would be possible to think that such "mortuary offerings" were intended to deceive the deceased. Even if this had been the case, scarcely anyone could suppose these objects to have been produced with the intention of distorting the picture of the past in the minds of future generations. (I suppose these phenomena to be connected with the cult and that these "substitute" mortuary offerings represent the consequence of the dematerialization of the conception of after life or, of the elevation of some objects — e. g. axes — to the rank of sacred symbols differing in their size or material from serviceable objects.)

There is certainly no doubt that even prehistoric societies, respectively their leading groups cared for the misrepresentation of the past and the present. To attain this purpose they certainly did not make use of serviceable objects but most probably of tradition. The records of prehistory are just these objects so important in life but not at all tradition which either has not survived at all or has survived in an altered form in which it is most difficult to recognize how far the original events had been distorted immediately after they had taken place and to recognize misrepresentation attributable to the lack of understanding of the further generations through which the tradition was handed down until it got fixed in written records.



It is possible to see in and to interpret the sumptuous, extensive architectural monuments of secular (fortifications) or cult (megalithic tombs, barrows) purpose as pomp intended to impress future generations. (Of course, this conception may be romantic and only possible in modern man beholding these unusual constructions which have survived in all their impressive greatness.) It is perhaps thinkable to admit of such an interpretation in so far as exceptional phenomena in their milieu are concerned, phenomena intended to draw all the attention upon themselves and their relation to the surroundings. But no particular attention will be focused upon them where, for example, fortifications are common, where megalithic tombs are usual, where barrows always cover the deceased. We rather incline to see in the different sizes, outfits and arrangements of such and similar objects a reflection of the economic and social station in life of the buried individual: also in this case the records are absolutely reliable. Here, pomp is not aimed at any deceit but purposes to express the standing of the defunct, its motive is social. Such deviations from the normal average are welcome as they allow us to trace the differences which existed in prehistoric societies. This concerns, for example, the exceptional, richly outfitted tumuli barrows of the Únětice culture in Thuringia, contrasting sharply with the common graves of contracted skeletons.

From these considerations, which could be enlarged by numerous examples and extended in many directions, it follows that prehistoric archaeologic records must be considered true and reliable: they served life in its reality and were not devised to deceive contemporaneous or future generations.

#### THE DEFECTIVITY OF ARCHAEOLOGIC RECORDS

The possibilities of a more universal use of archaeologic records are restrained by some external circumstances that are not rooted in the nature of these records. It is necessary to keep in mind that already in the past many of these records were destroyed and thus every possibility of their scientific utilization has disappeared. Many a time it happens even now that archaeologic records are destroyed or reduced in their scientific value by inexpert interferences. Everyone knows that a vast number of archaeologic objects must still be hidden in the soil. It is difficult to make an estimate what their known portion in a certain delimited area may be and how many of them have not yet been brought to light. Sometimes it is only an insignificant portion of the archaeological records that is available for scientific work. The insufficient number of publications of records is also a serious obstacle

as the interpreter works sometimes only with the published or easily accessible but not with all the existing and to a certain problem belonging material. That refers principally to elaborations concerning wide areas or areas the material of which is deposited in numerous museums. I omit the well known fact that many records are not made use of as the author does not master the languages in which the respective records are published.

In the nature of the material lies the disadvantage that the archaeologist is compelled to work with finds made of durable substances, with records which have survived from prehistoric times until to-day.

It is the knowledge of the defectiveness of archaeologic records that lead to critical caution in the interpretation of phenomena for which only single or few records are at our disposal. It is imperative to use the greatest possible number of archaeologic records, a vast quantity of archaeologic material: it is only in this way that we shall be able to reduce the gaps in the material which is necessary for the solution of certain problems, but which is not and can not be available. The record areas with which hitherto we have been working on the basis of expertly controlled explorations are still too little: the time of large, lasting syntheses based on wide spread and from every point of view in detail elaborated records from large areas has by far not yet come. The working up of the great quantity of material will require the utilization of technologic analyses, methods of statistics, etc. The material will mainly come from the exploration of settlements which, in general, begins only now on a large scale. We are aware of the mentioned defectivity of archaeologic records and stand only on the threshold of the possibilities of a more systematic and deeper cognition of prehistory.

#### ARCHAEOLOGIC RECORDS FROM THE SOCIAL POINT OF VIEW

S. J. De Laet<sup>4</sup> emphasized the fact that the written records differ fundamentally from the archaeologic ones as the former originated in the sphere of the governing classes of society whereas the latter came from all the component groups of prehistoric society. This definition of the difference of the origin of the two kinds of record can easily be substantiated by their quite heterogeneous, absolutely divergent, original functions in the life of man. Archaeologic records are, properly speaking, originally nothing but objects serving the purposes of life as fittings, implements, weapons, ornaments, etc.: they are objects used in economic, social and cultural life. On the contrary, the origin of

<sup>4</sup> "L'Archéologie", p. 10.

written records assigns them to the sphere of spiritual culture. From the social point of view, archaeologic records are of the highest value, they embrace all the classes of prehistoric society whereas the written ones had been a privilege of the leading classes of society. Consequently the value of archaeologic finds elaborated into historic records is primary.

R. Braidwood<sup>5</sup> divides archaeologic records in their relation to man into two fundamental major categories: artifactual or man-made materials and not-artifactual materials (animal bones, burned grains, shells, skeletons of men themselves, etc.). Doing archaeologic work we meet with the corroboration of the correctness of this division at every step: either of the two mentioned categories of archaeologic records requires quite other methods in its elaboration.

From the economic, social and cultural points of view archaeologic records can be considered to be completer and more universal than are the written ones in many a period (especially the earlier periods) and in many areas. Quite different it is with the interpretation of the two kinds of record. The ways of interpretation are here totally different and one may say that they are more intricate and difficult with archaeologic records. This follows from their original function as objects serving the purposes of life wherefore they can not be considered as fully demonstrative historic records until after their archaeologic elaboration. For their historic interpretation it is necessary to make use of all the available means the number of which will certainly be increased by new methods from the sphere of the natural and technical sciences.

#### ARCHAEOLOGIC CULTURES

Prehistory, just as well as history, should give a true picture of the past in accordance with integral social wholes and units. To-day's state of the interpretation does not yet allow to define and demarcate actual social units whose interior and exterior relations should be traced with the greatest possible precision into their details on the basis of all the archaeologic records at our disposal. Sociological notions derived from recent historic periods and applied to prehistory are only partly valid in a general sense, the value of analogy may be attributed to them only to a certain degree. Such transplanted notions can not be simply and directly identified with or substantiated by means of certain complexes of archaeologic material. There is no doubt that, after thorough exploration and perfect interpretation, conditions ascertained at settlements in combination with the funerary rites will lead us to important conclusions of social character. These must then be compared with the

<sup>5</sup> The Near East and the Foundations for Civilization, p. 7. Eugene, Oregon 1952.

material of related historic branches, but it will always be necessary to avoid mechanical transplantations of intricate phenomena from other milieus and periods.

At the present, prehistory has no possibility to base its descriptions of historic evolutions on other concrete units than archaeologic cultures<sup>6</sup>. Archaeologic cultures can (but need not) be characterized by the same economic system but even then they can not be considered as economic wholes.

An archeologic culture is not either a social unit: this is shown by anthropogeographic reasons as well as by the particular character of an archaeologic culture. Geographically such an extensive one as the Unětice culture or the culture of the Tumulus people of the Early and the Middle Bronze Age can not be simple interpreted as social units<sup>7</sup>. They would have had to be highly organized bodies in order to be able to form uniform societies on such vast territories. It is difficult to imagine the existence of such great "pre-state" or other highly developed social units in prehistoric times. Even if we are inclined to admit for the Neolithic Age — and all the more then for later prehistoric periods — of a certain well advanced degree of social organization<sup>8</sup> yet we do rather conceive of such social units as little ones, territorially restricted to fortified settlements and their nearest surroundings with settlements without fortifications (of course, these circumstances have not yet been explored and proved.) Although we do not want to make use, as an analogy, of the accelerated social development in the Eastern Mediterranean, where a straight line leads from the urbanization directly to the little town states, nevertheless this parallel does not yet mean that we could expect to find in prehistoric Central Europe such vast social units as represented by the archaeologic cultures. (If we are

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the definition of the concept "archaeologic culture" see F. C. Bursch, *Vorgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte*. "Actes de la III<sup>me</sup> Session Zurich 1950 — Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques", pp. 86 ff, Zürich 1953. — Surveys and analyses of the conceptions "culture" brings the synthetic work: A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture*. A critical review of concepts and definitions (with the assistance of Wayne Untereiner and appendices by Alfred G. Meyer). "Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University" Vol. XLVII — No. 1. Cambridge, Massachusetts 1952.

<sup>7</sup> Conclusions on the example of the Neolithic Windmill Hill culture by M. A. Smith, *The limitation of inference in archaeology*. "Archaeological News Letters" Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 4, London 1955.

<sup>8</sup> Jiří Neustupný, *Fortifications appartenant à la civilisation danubienne néolithique*. (Premières bourgades en Europe Centrale.) "Archiv Orientální" XVIII, p. 131 ff, Prague 1950.



so sceptical of the social significance of archaeologic cultures we can not either simply attribute to them the notion of national units as it happened and still sometimes happens now.)

Also the true, by no schematization of the archaeologic classification veiled, character proper to archaeologic cultures speaks against their interpretation as social units. We shall deal with this problem in the next chapter.

### THE BOUNDARIES OF ARCHAEOLOGIC CULTURES

I should like to emphasize that we can get two very different aspects of archeologic cultures. In the first one they are precisely definable and delimitable without any relations to the adjoining cultures: transplanted from somewhere else, they appear as a compact alien whole in the milieu of other cultures with which they do not mingle in the beginning, to which they do not succumb, which they do not absorb. Such is the case of the Corded-Ware culture in Central Europe appearing there as an alien new-comer in the milieu of the Danubian Eneolithic region. The same can be said of the Bell-Beaker culture in the territory of Central Europe where it appears in the milieu of the late projections of the Eneolithic period. Such archaeologic cultures, taken as wholes, are in their contents as well as territorially clearly distinguishable from the other cultures with which they share the inhabited area. Generally they represent the secondary settlement in the area into which they got through invasion. In this first aspect archaeologic cultures appear as alien and precisely delimited wholes among the other surrounding cultures.

Then there are the archaeologic cultures seen from the other point of view. That are cultures to which the words "home" and "native" are often added. They are territorially in contact with related cultures and types which, together with them, form greater cultural wholes called culture areas. The boundaries between the individual cultures in such a congenial culture area or territory seem to be sufficiently sharp and clear if we observe them in their material coming from geographically distant regions, from diametrically opposed sides. But as soon as we take materials from the region of contact of such two cultures, the sharp differences disappear and we find gradual transitions. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize where one culture ends and the other one begins. This is a natural and comprehensible phenomenon as the two cultures are closely related and belong to a greater whole (sphere or culture area). The more we learn to know the archaeologic finds from contact zones between adjoining cultures of such greater and higher

units, the greater our embarrassment at their delimitation. Of course, there the question may arise whether prehistory uses in such cases the correct term "culture" and whether it is not an archaeologic unit of a lower kind as, for instance, type or similarly termed: in such cases it would be necessary to solve the relations between the individual types belonging to one and the same, more extensive, culture. We meet with serious obstacles at the delimitation of cultures in a greater common area as, for instance, in the Central European territory of the Urnfield people whose individual cultures are often closely related and make an indisputable demarcation difficult: the late Lusatian culture, the Knovíz culture, the Milavče culture, the groups of the South German Urnfield culture, etc.<sup>9</sup>

To-day's, in many cases evident, difference between cultures of the same sphere or area and between the individual types belonging to the same culture is more or less caused by the low number of connecting finds from the transition zones. As soon as there will be a sufficient number of them at our disposal it will be necessary to begin with the revision and exacter definition of the neighbouring types of the same culture or adjoining cultures of the same area or sphere. Already to-day there arise difficulties where and how to draw a precise border line between the late Lusatian (Lausitz) culture and the Knovíz culture. Their elements can be ascertained in a wide zone reaching from Central Germany to North-East Bohemia though their centers lie in North West and in in Central Bohemia<sup>10</sup>.

Up to now, the division into archaeologic types, groups and cultures was often done in a fortuitous way, in the best of cases on the basis of the more significant discoveries. We think that in the future it will be necessary to establish in this respect a correcter order through the utilization of the detailed elaboration of great quantities of material and by means of the statistic evaluation of the various distinctive features of the archaeologic material. Perhaps it would be convenient to apply here the notion of the typological limits: with centers-climaxes and

<sup>9</sup> A similar theme, but with another objective and other conclusions, is treated by M. Jahn, *Die Abgrenzung von Kulturgruppen und Völkern in der Vorgeschichte*. "Berichte über die Abhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig" Phil. hist. Klasse, Vol. 99, No. 3, Berlin 1953.

<sup>10</sup> W. Coblentz, *Keramik mit Knoviser Anklängen aus dem Vogtland*. "Arbeits- und Forschungsberichte zur sächsischen Bodendenkmalpflege" No. 4, pp. 286 ff, Dresden 1954. J. Hralová-Adamczyková, *K problémům pozdní doby bronzové v Pojizeří* — Zu den Problemen der späten Bronzezeit im Isergebiet. "Sborník Národního musea v Praze — Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae", Vol. XI-A Historia No. 1. pp. 32 ff., p. 41, Prague 1957.

transitions from one center to another one, as used by the physical anthropology in the notion of the variation. The centers of these archaeological types would be represented by the climaxes of the types or cultures. The divides (boundaries) between the various types or cultures could be determined through the statistic summarization of the conforming and of the differing marks. Together with such a gradual progressive examination of the contents and delimitation a revision of the terminology which can no more be considered appropriate, could take place. Our terminology developed under conditions very different from to-day's claims on prehistory as a historical science. Archaeologic cultures seen from this second point of view are not easily separable from their greater wholes, areas or spheres: their neighbours are related cultures from which they do not differ sharply. These conditions originated through differentiation developing in the interior of an already settled, quieter area which gradually disintegrated into what we understand by the term "culture" and these cultures, in their turn, disintegrated into what we call "types". Besides disintegration also the migration into near, closely adjoining areas could exert its influence here. A case of diffusion rather than of invasion.

One and the same archaeological culture can present both the mentioned aspects. Thus the culture of the Bell-Beakers presents another aspect (invasion) from the standpoint of its relations to the other cultures of the Central European Eneolithic Age than from the standpoint of the interior aspect (diffusion) wherefrom we observe that in the territory of Central Europe, in the areas of Bohemia-Moravia-Thuringia-Rhineland, groups (types) can be ascertained the centers of which differ from one another, but the divides separating them show signs of transition.

The foregoing observations concerned several open, not yet solved, problems. They can not be solved but by the accumulation of the endeavours of many scientists in a widely organized international collaboration<sup>11</sup>.

Prague, November 1957

<sup>11</sup> Translated by L. Ducek.