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Toward an Eventful Archaeology: Approaches to Structural Change in the Archaeological Record

Organizer: Douglas Bolender
Keynote Speaker: Graeme Barker
Discussants: James A. Brown and Ezra Zubrow

Abstracts

Please notes this not the presentation order

EVENTS, TEMPORALITIES AND LANDSCAPES IN ICELAND

Oscar Aldred and Gavin Lucas, University of Iceland, Iceland

Events are only events when they have happened; they have tense. Considering then the links between temporality and the event is one way to tease out the importance in understanding 'durible ruptures': the structures that remain resilient to change and have high degrees of residuality. This paper considers long-term structures in the Icelandic landscape by considering them assemblage-like; composed of elements with variable degrees of reversibility and residuality but which collectively form coherent structures. The resilience then of landscape's elements, such as boundaries and routes, to change by events is dependent on their ability to adapt outside their configured contexts and to act as structural anchors. In doing so the connections between temporality and events are explored.

THE AD 79 ERUPTION OF MT VESUVIUS: A SIGNIFICANT OR INSIGNIFICANT EVENT?

Penelope Allison, University of Leicester, UK

The AD 79 eruption of Mt Vesuvius was a catastrophic event for the Roman towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum. While scholarly focus on this event has assured Pompeii a place in the history of Roman daily life, it has downplayed Pompeii's place in the history of the region. How much has this focus misrepresented Pompeii's true role in the archaeology and history of southern Italy?

This paper will briefly review Pompeian scholarship and discuss Pompeii's archaeological and historical significance in the political, economic and social history of the Campanian region. It will use examples from the material and epigraphical record at Pompeii to illustrate the misappropriation of these remains to epitomise a universality of Roman urban life. I will argue, conversely, that much can be learnt from the Pompeian remains about south Italian urban living before and during the Roman period.

MAD BUILDER OR ARCHITECT OF SOCIAL CHANGE? EVENTFUL ARCHAEOLOGY, THE HEUNEBURG MUD-BRICK WALL AND THE EARLY IRON AGE OF SOUTHWEST GERMANY

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The Period IV Heuneburg mud-brick wall, constructed sometime around 600 BC and destroyed by fire some 60 years later, clearly represents a break with the indigenous fortification tradition that preceded and succeeded it. Other evidence for Mediterranean contact and influence, particularly in the form of imported pottery, is minimal until after the mud-brick wall Heuneburg and its associated outer settlement were razed around 540 BC. This suggests that the impact of the initial event represented by the physical alteration of the environment in the form of the mud-brick wall extended to structural transformations within the society over the next two generations. An analysis of the late Hallstatt Heuneburg landscape from the "eventful archaeology" perspective proposed by this symposium seems particularly appropriate in this case because the transformation of

the built environment appears to have preceded and naturalized the social transformations that were to follow. The eventual leveling of the mud-brick wall takes on added significance in view of the fact that by the time of this iconoclastic action, the social rupture and rearticulation wrought by contact with distant power centers were already irreversible. This rearticulation can be seen in the construction of a massive wall and ditch system surrounding the hillfort after 540 BC as well as in the erection of four monumental burial mounds on the remains of the outer settlement, one of which contained four secondary burials with gold neckrings, ordinarily only found in paramount central chamber graves. Traditional archaeological interpretations of the mud-brick wall will be presented in light of the eventful archaeology paradigm taking into consideration recent evidence from the mortuary and settlement record associated with this early Iron Age hillfort in southwest Germany.

A PALEOHISTORICAL APPROACH TO PALEOLITHIC STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Françoise Audouze, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France

When applied to Paleolithic times, the formulation of W. Sewell on the relation between historical events and structure changes offers a challenging framework for problematizing changes in social structures and cultures. Are there events of transformative significance other than climatic or environmental events for predators such as hunters-gatherers? Can prehistorians perceive them? Can they perceive the rhythm of changes and the multiple scales in time and space at which the mutations occur? As a matter of facts prehistorians have an easier access to the successive structures defining cultures than to events. Most events localized at the historical scale are out of their reach apart from micro-events such as exceptionally rich burials or a change in the reindeer herd migration road or consequences of an unknown event such as a rupture in long distance exchanges.

A novel approach developed in France by Boris Valentin advocates for a paleohistory dedicated to an intermediate scale of time “temps intermédiaire” that extends between the prehistoric "temps long" analogous to the Braudelian historical " longue durée" but measured in millennia, and the "temps court" of days, weeks, months. This intermediate time is the time during which events and mutations occur, that transform a material culture or tradition into another one as well as its socio-economic organization. Using recent results in lithic and bone technology that permit to identify norms of production, goals and achievements, results in faunal analyses leading to clues about hunting techniques, and data on long distance exchanges, it becomes possible to reconstruct changing processes and the string of mutations leading from a tradition to the next one, as well as to identify rupture in continuity and to infer the resulting social transformations. But while in several cases we can suspect that the occurrence of brutal changes may have been triggered by particular events, the too coarse-grained ^{14}C dating does not permit to prove it and to precisely define their temporality. Examples are drawn from the Tardiglacial in the Paris Basin, Western Switzerland and the Middle Rhine Valley.

“EVENTFUL ARCHAEOLOGY? AN ANNALISTE PERSPECTIVE”

John Bintliff, Leiden University, Netherlands

Sewell's emphasis on Events in the historical development of societies is a welcome contribution to the recent debate on Time and Archaeology, stimulating the important application in a cross-cultural perspective by Beck *et al.* 2007. In many respects, the Annales School of History in France gave us some decades of thoughtful discussion of Time and Process, which largely remain unknown to archaeologists, who tend to reduce the sophistication of its more recent exponents to the 'long-term' determinism of Braudel. This paper will review the continued potential of the post-Braudelian synthesis of Annaliste approaches to past societies, at the same time indicating how it meshes well with other forms of Time-History such as Gould's Punctuated Equilibrium, Chaos-Complexity theory, Giddens' views on Agency, and recent advances in Neuro-Pyschology relating to Agency. As with the Beck *et al.* paper, I shall illustrate the argument with case-study material from the Mediterranean archaeological and historical record.

EVENTS OF DIFFERENT DURATION: RE-TRACING LIVED TIME IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Dušan Borić, University of Cambridge, UK

First, the paper examines the usefulness of Braudel's tripartite division of history and subsequent discussions about the contribution of Annale school of historical analyses within the field of phenomenological philosophy. It is argued that the event should be seen as the main site of historical analyses since the notion of event, of different qualities and duration, conflates the *longue durée* levels identified by Braudel: geohistory happens on the human scale and in relation to trends and specific events while economies or empires of the second level equally depend on determining events. Implications for archaeology are examined.

Second, the paper discusses the microhistorical 'politics of event'. Event is seen as the 'principle of individuation' – it emerges instead of something that could have arisen but it did not. Can archaeology, thus, tell a story of potentialities, of failed projects of history, of 'non-events'? And, are microhistorical, individual narratives 'slender clues' of much larger phenomena, or different scales of historical analyses are incommensurable? These questions are examined by looking at determining events of structured abandonment of built structures and of mortuary features in a serious of collective *re*-presentations within the context of changing cultural repertoires affecting Mesolithic foragers in the Danube Gorges of the Balkans from 6300 to 5900 cal BC.

EVENTS AND STRUCTURES. THE "NEOLITHIC *ARGONAUTS"* OF THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AS A CASE STUDY

Pedro Díaz-del-Río, Instituto de Historia Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, Spain

I will explore two particularly problematic aspects of applying an "eventful" analysis to our deep Prehistory. First, the difficulty of recognizing which of all possible -preserved and discovered- evidence signals the meaningful/critical eventful occurrence triggering a

structural transformation (our *Bastille*). Secondly, the problems of using whatever existing archaeological periodization as a direct reflection of historically coherent structures and structural changes. In order to do so I will present a potentially "eventful" case study: the Serpis Valley (Valencia, Spain) between 5500 and 4900 cal BC. In this area, a novel patterning of the built environment and other features of the archaeological record was both preceded and followed by the absence of evidence, and has been interpreted as a result of the colonization of pioneering Neolithic *argonauts* of the western Mediterranean.

EVENTS THAT SHAKE HOUSEHOLDS

Joan Gero, American University, Washington, DC

The transformative, restructuring "events" that have already come under archaeological scrutiny address the use of space and architectural constructions. My talk will focus more directly on how transformative events ramify in households and domestic spheres, arenas in which social roles and relations are perhaps most deeply expressed and most faithfully reproduced. Examples drawn from my research in the Andean world will complement other published household data that can be reinterpreted as "eventful" in Sewell's terms. Taken together, these examples will finally be used to probe the generalizing and specifying logics, the semantics and categories of contexts relevant to adopting Sewell's "eventful" archaeology.

BEYOND GLOOM AND DOOM: EVENTFUL ARCHAEOLOGY AND VOLCANIC DISASTERS

John Grattan, Aberystwyth University, Ceredigion, UK

There has been a boom in archaeological research focused on the effects of ancient catastrophes on cultural change. A great deal of the literature examining the role of natural disasters in human history is sensationalist and based on unproven correlation and impact. A more useful approach utilises sound analyses that clearly and ambiguously demonstrate causation. Well researched, balanced case studies make the most important contribution to our understanding of how human societies have lived and coped with environmental perturbations. One of the aims of this paper, therefore, is to present studies that take a penetrating and critical view of whether and how disasters have shaped the past. Sewell rightly argues that:

"A single isolated rupture rarely has the effect of transforming structures because standard procedures and sanctions can usually repair the torn fabric of social practice"

In the case of natural disasters, as the examples presented here will demonstrate, the event is incidental; it is context which is king.

Already studies along these lines have produced some surprises, as illustrated in Torrence and Grattan. The book demonstrated that, in general, popularist treatments of ancient disasters and their obsession for death, destruction and flight have been grossly overstated. In contrast, many of the case studies showed that human societies have been incredibly resilient and have recovered remarkably well despite having experienced wide scale destruction and/or significant mortality. The few examples of collapse were limited

to disasters with very high magnitude environmental agents or involved societies that were unstable or already in decline.

A second way that modern approaches to natural disasters have influenced scholarship is through shifting the primary focus away from the strength of the environmental forcing mechanism as the primary agent of change to the vulnerability of past societies. Disasters are now seen as social rather than simply environmental phenomena. Although current thinking is clearly an improvement over the previous separation of environmental and social science approaches to disasters, the new emphasis on vulnerability has meant that people are mainly conceived of as helpless 'victims' which detailed archaeological research clearly shows to be wrong. .

When a much wider range of potential outcomes are considered, one discovers a complex mix of responses to disasters. Most significantly, creative as well as destructive effects on human societies are commonly observed. The key to this new approach is the consideration of vulnerability, disaster and recovery as a process that unfolds over a reasonably long period of time. Scholars who have examined disasters over the long-term have often found that their effects can linger on for a long time and/or be used and reinterpreted by subsequent societies. The role of oral history and myth has been important in keeping the memory of disasters alive, acting as an invaluable source of information about how to handle similar risks in the future, and providing raw material for re-interpretation. Humans have not just responded to their environment, even when coping with its catastrophic consequences. Instead, people often move beyond the devastating initial impacts to incorporate their experiences in a myriad of creative and fascinating ways.

Focusing on the evidence provided by a single devastated site can be misleading.Pompeii was destroyed by the Roman world was unaffected, numerous structures have been destroyed by volcanic activity in Mexico but the cultures affected responded vigorously to the pressure. In Japan reconstruction of destroyed villages depended more on the will and energy of the controlling authority than on the magnitude of the event.

Equally, focusing on a massive event can be equally misleading. Within a typical window of opportunity afforded by archaeological dating methods, the huge eruption of Laki Fissure in 1783 could be held responsible for destruction layers and oral histories associated with the American war of Independence, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Of course it was responsible for none of these and though the impacts of the eruption at the time were extreme it had no lasting impact and, outside Iceland, was swiftly forgotten.

An archaeology of events need also take account of what we do not know! The ice core record suggests that there have been many more significant eruption in human history than we currently know of. Indeed the greatest of these, in 1258 AD, was unknown until recently and inevitably would have had an impact of vulnerable communities around the world.

The case studies presented here show that by adopting wider perspectives and combining forces to enhance databases, archaeologists, environmental and social scientists can mobilize historical studies together with the information contained in oral history and ideologies to achieve a rich understanding of how human societies have experienced, coped with and used volcanic events. The new picture that is emerging is coloured not only by death, destruction, and collapse, but also by recovery, regeneration

and creation of new environments and cultural patterns. Extreme events have been very powerful factors in human history, but the consequences have not all been negative.

MERWAR'S HOPE: TRANSFORMATION AND RESIDUALITY IN THE HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF ATLANTIC HISTORY.

Dan Hicks, Oxford University, UK

In historical anthropology the idea of 'the event' has been developed and debated especially in relation to colonial encounters and interactions, most famously though Sahlins' idea of the 'conjuncture'. For Sahlins, the event reconciles human practices and human cultures in anthropological studies of social change, showing 'how events are ordered by culture, but how, in that process, the culture is reordered'. In a similar vein, a generation ago the nascent interpretive archaeologies combined the distinction between structure and agency in the practice theory of Giddens and Bourdieu, at the heart of which lay a call for social theory to become more 'contextual', with a model of time derived from the Annalistes, in order to mediate between different 'scales' of time in the human past: *événement, conjuncture, longue durée*.

Today, the utility of this scalar model of time, the attendant uses of social theory in archaeology and anthropology, are increasingly called into question. This has significant implications for the study of 'the event' in anthropological archaeology. In an influential critique of Sahlins' study, Marilyn Strathern argued that a focus on events as 'interpreted action' has used the idea of the event much as anthropologists habitually think of artefacts: as entities that require elucidation through contextualising academic practice, which mediates across incommensurable scales, from happening to structure. In practice, this has led to an understanding of both events and artefacts as merely illustration of social relations, which are understood as the true object of study. Thus, in the study of colonial encounters the coming of Europeans has been understood as a unique event, requiring explanation in purely socio-cultural terms (whether indigenous or European, or the interaction between the two).

In the anthropology of the event, an alternative is to consider how particular forms of time can emerge from materially-engaged or embodied practices. Similarly, a number of archaeologists have recently sought to account for material, rather than purely social, forms of time. By focusing upon eventful social change, we reduce fleeting moments to chunks of a unilinear or stadial process of time. But time 'is not only transformation, but *duration*', and the persistence of materials from the past means that no moment is 'unique in time', but is filled with the remains of many pasts. This, we might suggest, is how materials (landscapes, buildings, objects) 'make' time: the pace of which derives from the varying 'momentum' of substance, and the substance of which emerges through the transformative processes of residuality, towards survival or fragmentation.

In this context, this paper seeks to make a distinctively archaeological contribution from the early modern Atlantic to the anthropological debate over events and colonial encounters in the Pacific. It focuses upon the historical archaeology of the foundation of the first permanent English settlement in the Caribbean at Old Road, St Kitts in 1624: traditionally celebrated as a significant historical event by English imperial historiography. By placing the material dimensions of landscape and artefacts and the

heart of a reappraisal of the documented interactions between the Carib King Tegreman, and Sir Thomas Warner and Ralph Merrifield (whose names were combined at the time to refer to the island as a kind of future-oriented project, 'Merwar's Hope'), the paper considers how archaeology's material focus can refocus our comprehension of the moments of encounter and interaction between European colonialism and indigenous history.

FREEDOM AS EVENT: THE TRANSFORMATION OF HOME, WORK, AND SELF IN EARLY NEW YORK

Christopher N. Matthews, Hofstra University, NY

During the early American period in New York the labor force shifted from one that included a large number of enslaved persons to one consisting entirely of persons who were free. This transformation was formalized through a Gradual Emancipation Act passed in 1799 that allowed slavery to continue until 1827. The movement towards freedom may be tied a political economic shift recorded by both historians and archaeologists that re-designated the basis of social standing from work to the possession of the self illustrated by the demands of the labor market and in the creation of the home as a space apart from work. While colonial and early post-colonial labor was largely controlled by masters who both employed and housed workers, with freedom, laborers and masters alike were removed from the workplace to informally class segregated residential sections of the city. From these homes masters and laborers then convened in the new public space of the labor market that materialized their equivalence as persons and potential citizens in the American democracy. Using data from archaeological studies of the New York metropolitan region, this paper identifies how the expectations of freedom smoothed the ruptures caused by the dispossession of workers from the control of their labor and the introduction of the home as a possession that defines the 'real' self.

THE ALLURE OF THE EVENT IN ROMAN PROVINCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Louise Revell, Southampton University, UK

The relationship between historical narrative and archaeological data has been problematic in the study of the Roman provinces, with archaeology used to plug the gaps in the narratives drawn from textual sources. Since the time of Mommsen in the nineteenth century, the central question within provincial archaeology has been the formation and administration of provincial societies, with named historical actors as key players. In the last twenty years, attention has instead focussed on longer term processes of cultural change, such as the development of urbanism and the economy. At the same time, calls for a more socially based archaeology have only been partially met, and topics such as gender are still largely marginalised.

This paper will explore the ideas of an eventful archaeology from the perspective of the archaeology of the Roman provinces, and in particular, those of the Roman west. It will explore three themes in particular: (1) the definition and identification of the event;

(2) the relationship between event and process; (3) the consequences for our understanding of agency in the past.

SLAVERY AND AMAZONS: A CASE OF CONTACT-INITIATED RAPID GENDER REVERSAL

Timothy Taylor, University of Bradford

Using the so-called 'Amazons' as an example, I will argue that culture contact and rapid economic change may be acutely reflected in the gender sub-systems of archaeological cultures. Arising quickly in the 5th century BC on the Russian and Ukrainian steppes, and traceable both historically/mythically and archaeologically in terms of putative gynoid skeletons with 'male weaponry (a.k.a. 'Amazon burials'), the Amazon phenomenon (or phenomena) is under-theorized. I will try to show that it can best be seen as part of changes to elite-level status dynamics that warped gender relations; it thereby has parallels with ethnographically-documented cases of gender- and status shifts among Crow and Blackfoot female heads of families in the early period of the North American fur trade. In order to understand how this can be, the widespread underestimation of the scale and reach of the Mediterranean/Aegean classical economy has to be overcome. By referring to recent fieldwork at sites such as Belsk in eastern Ukraine (plausibly Herodotus's 'Gelonus'), coupled with quantitative work on the slave trade, I will present a picture of elite women progressively cut out of new slavery-generated wealth in the Black Sea region. They may have chosen to gender-cross in order more effectively to compete with predominantly male martial nomadic elites among whom wealth differences were becoming increasingly marked through Greek colonial contact. Issues of bias in the historical accounts and in the archaeological funerary record will also be examined.

FROM *LONGUE DURÉE* TO EVENT AND BACK: TIMESCALES FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHANGE IN EARLY NEOLITHIC SOUTHERN BRITAIN

Alasdair Whittle, Cardiff University, Wales, UK

Annaliste historians, classically including Ferdnand Braudel, have been prominent in suggesting different timescales at which to consider change in human societies. In archaeology, it is their sense of *la longue durée* which has resonated most and been most widely adopted. The theory of the event recently propounded by William Sewell Jr, within an agency-structure framework, redresses the balance in a very welcome fashion.

This paper has two related aims. First, I seek to critique the notion of the Sewellian event. Is the duality of structure enough? How can we humanise our varied notions of agency? And is the Sewellian event not in part a self-fulfilling prophecy, since phenomena not deemed to lead to permanent or profound structural change are classed simply as happenings? Are differing timescales at which change takes place sufficiently acknowledged?

Secondly, using as principal case study a current major project — with my colleagues Alex Bayliss of English Heritage and Frances Healy of Cardiff University — on the radiocarbon dating of causewayed enclosures, from the early Neolithic of southern Britain, I reflect on the choice of timescales now available to the prehistorian, once formal chronological modelling of radiocarbon results has been carried out within a Bayesian statistical framework. Our project, together with a related project on long barrows (already published), suggests that we can use formal date estimates of this kind to propose a far more precise sense of the timing of change in prehistory. We can consider not only the *longue durée* —though perhaps at rather shorter scales than *Annalistes* envisaged — but also 'events': particular acts of construction and deposition. We can also bring into the frame identifiable bursts of activity in concentrated horizons. And we can combine these with a sense of change over human lifetimes and generations, and even over decades. From all this we can construct a feeling for the varying tempo of change in prehistory, not all of which should be reduced to a notion of the event, or smeared to create long-term process.