Ethno-Archaeology in Rural America

by

William C. Rhinehart
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Pledge: William Rhinehart
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Introduction

Ethnoarchaeology is a combined archaeological, ethnological, ethnographic and historical study. For each excavated site there seems to be at least one informant who has lived or has had contact with people who have lived during the study period. When combined with the sparse historical data there is provided three different viewpoints: ethnographic, archaeological and historical. Ethnoarchaeology is very important as William H. Adams of Washington State University author of Silcott, Washington: Ethnoarchaeology of a Rural American Community stated "Small farming communities were an important part of American culture, yet they have been neglected by archaeologists and historians."¹

Since most communities in the 1800's were small analysis of cultural materials--the artifacts--reveals several interpretive problems. As Mr. R. A. Gould, of Experimental Archeology states "If generalizations or specific techniques are derived from the study of a single group they may not be applicable, across the board, to the entire range of relevant extant peoples, they cannot serve as a safe framework for the interpretations of past cultures, objects and events."² A wide range, a cross-cultural approach provides a necessary and desirable stepping stone from the single present-day society to the broad and varied past.

Artifact interpretation also seems to be a problem. Artifact interpretation doesn't contradict the ethnographic
model, but it is not very supportive of the model either. As Adams states, "In many respects the ethnographic and archaeological models are separate, yet overlapping views of the same thing." For example, while we know ethnographically that a large amount of things were made at home, most of the archaeological material came from long distances. Archaeological evidence seems to point out that nationally distributed products were more popular, whereas regionally and locally made goods are poorly represented in the hollows.

Ethnoarchaeology as a word or concept, has very much been defined. But in my report ethnoarchaeology will be defined as a group of people (ranging from family to community) through a combination of historical, archaeological and ethnographic methodologies. Ethnoarchaeology is related to many methodologies, ethnohistory, historical archaeology, living archaeology and ethnographic analogy, but these methodologies are also distinguished from ethnoarchaeology. As Adams reported, "Ethnoarchaeology employs a continuous model by utilizing the direct historical approach."

Even when excavating a walled village, archaeologists have to contend with the problems of both the physical and social boundaries of their study. If their study is to have any meaning it has to be delineated in both time and space, for otherwise the results can't be compared with other research.

The boundary can be defined in many different ways. Geographical areas such as the site and the locality are the
easiest to use. The site is generally a unit of settlement within a locality, whereas the locality is a larger settlement unit, similar in a conceptual sense to the area a community might occupy.

Locating Sites through Informants

While dealing with archaeological sites in rural areas it is very important to have living informants. With the limitations of archaeological data, several important sites might never have been excavated for several important reasons: 1) the site might not have been found, 2) if we have found them we would not have known their significance, 3) if we had excavated them we would have likely misinterpreted the results.

Informants are extremely important when dealing with sites. Although informants can usually remember the general vicinity of a site, they are usually around fifty to a hundred feet off. The specific location of most sites is usually left to the archaeologist. A good example of this is the Carr Site in which we excavated. The diary and Mrs. Teaford put the Carr site in these hollows and they were both right. Informants have a tendency to remember what was once there in great detail, but many times they could not place where things were exactly.

The Locality

Just as the informants provided the cognitive boundaries of a site the informants also provided the cognitive boundaries of the community. As Murdock cited, the community has been
defined as "the maximal group of persons who normally reside in face-to-face association." The people in Rockbridge County hollows were community oriented, and, while not in daily face-to-face contact, the people certainly interacted within a definite area. As stated elsewhere the borders can be delineated on the basis of interaction spheres, that is, on the frequency and depth of interpersonal relationships between neighbors. Those borders were defined sharply, both socially and geographically.

Archaeology and the Community

When studying the community through archaeology, first you must excavate a number of sites, not just one site. Since a broader perspective of the people themselves, to find their broader social framework, is being looked at, excavation of a single site and knowledge about the site and the people who occupied it, isn't as important. As William H. Adams stated, "The broader the archaeological data base is, the broader the inferences that can be made from it." With only an individual site, inferences based on it are limited to similar sites, similar kinds of sites, and other sites with the same kind of cultural framework. A culturally meaningful sample is what we need to make probability statements, and sets of inferences that are true within the known data. The known archaeological premises are probably true, but not all premises about the community are knowable through the archaeology. A large exploratory to determine individual sites is best to
seldom has been defined and there are specific goals, methodological structures, or widely accepted techniques of analysis." In order to understand what ethnoarchaeology is we must first examine a number of similar yet distinct approaches. William H. Adams stated, "Ethnoarchaeology is a hybrid of several different scholarly approaches; as a hybrid it appears to have tremendous vigor and research potential, but as a hybrid certain theoretical and methodological problems must be reconciled." Ethnoarchaeology as a hybrid, can be considered a synergistic approach.

Synergistic Approaches

Synergistic approaches is a combining of similar methods at the same time to study a particular data set. The data gathered through this method is greater than the knowledge gained by each procedure separately. A synergistic approach generates more knowledge about a given data set than could be learned by using separately its various components methodologies to seek that knowledge.

In the synergistic approach, knowledge is seen as an infinite set of messages. Each message is coded, but it can also be unidentified in its transmission. The task is to identify the message and then to decode it. The messages are decided by checking the redundancy within the message. Jacob Bronowski wrote that "redundancy gives the code a structure or skeleton, which resists the distortion of its individual symbols." Redundancy is needed to see the messages' hidden
structure. Data repetition makes the chances increase of seeing the entire message clearly.

This is the true purpose of the analytical method in science: to shift our gaze from the thing or event to its structure. We understand a process, we explain it, when we lay bare in it a structure which is like one we have met elsewhere.¹¹

A message contributes to the understanding of knowledge through its scarcity: immensity and ingenuity contribute very little if the message becomes incomprehensible. The best way to study a particular phenomenon is to view it like a sphere, from many perspectives, in an effort to articulate the whole. The sphere of knowledge can't be viewed as a whole, but it can be viewed and understood from its component parts. In order to study the unique, the component parts of a message, similar messages are needed, so that those redundant enough to repeat information without the noise.

Ethnohistory, the synersistic approach is generated by applying both ethnographic and historical methods to a particular set of data. Charles Hudson defined ethnohistory as, "the application of historical method to the kinds of cultures and societies that social anthropologists study in their framework."¹² Ethnohistory conversely, could be considered to be defined as the application of ethnographic methods to the kinds of data that historians study, in other words, the diachronic study of culture. However, some historical
and ethnographic data can't be approached through ethnohistory, simply because the data produced by each approach might be too divergent from the other approach. When this happens little comparative data exists and little feedback can be generated. Although ethnographic data in many cases can be considered to be part of the historical record, it however remains unique and incomparable. With the emergence of ethnohistory, Julian Steward advocated, the emergence of ethnohistory is, "from the archaeologists' viewpoints re-emergence of the direct historical approach."\textsuperscript{13} The historian's viewpoint of ethnohistory is a result directly attributable to historians broadening their approach to history. The historians broadening the scope and meaning of history, and their shift from the traditional study of military, political and constitutional history, resulted in the study of historical archaeology. But as David L. Clarke says, "Once again it is possible to claim that historical evidence is more complete than the best archaeological evidence, but both have inherent bases and their information is intersecting and different, not merely better or worse."\textsuperscript{14}

**Historical Archaeology**

Historical archaeology is a combination of historical and archaeological methods. To perfect the field of historical archaeology requires either a team approach between the archaeologist and the historian or an archaeologist with
knowledge of both anthropological and historical methodologies. As William H. Adams says, "Historical archaeology has been defined by practice rather than by theoretical or philosophical parameters. Historical archaeology is the conjunction of historical and archaeological methodologies in the study of culture; it should not be limited to any geographical, temporal, or cultural area." However on the theoretical level, a greater interaction of all historical archaeologists would greatly improve the field of historical archaeology.

Living Archaeology

Living archaeology has a definite meaning and the key to it is in the observation of a culture in terms of how it would be represented in the archaeological record. With ethnographers either unwilling to provide material culture data or ignorant of archaeological needs to be unable to provide the needed data. As this was happening archaeologists began to study living communities as if they were archaeological sites. In the basic sense living archaeology is an archaeologically oriented ethnography. However R. A. Gould defined living archaeology, "the actual effort by an archaeologist or ethnographer to do field work in living human societies." Gould regards living archaeology to be distinct from the broader aspects of ethnoarchaeology. The research labeled as ethnoarchaeology is better remembered as living archaeology or as ethnographic analogy but all three are quite similar.
The general comparative approach is a derivative of the discontinuous model. The discontinuous model is a greater risk creating a faulty analogy. The term ethnoarchaeology should be applied only to the study of continuous models, of which the data derived from application of the direct historical approach.

There are three kinds of continuous models all of which were proposed by R. A. Gould concept:

1.) Continuous cultural model
2.) Continuous community model
3.) Continuous individual model

The cultural model is the broadest of the three models. The cultural model is the model for an entire culture. This unit, however, can be broken down into small units, by area and region. In the community model the ethnographic data is more restrictive to either members of that community or lineal descendants of people who lived in that community. The most restrictive of the three is the individual model. As William H. Adams says, "This means in ethnoarchaeology that the informants were not only members of the community being studied but also that they have direct information about the site being excavated." The continuous individual model is the least used because of the difficulty of finding an informant, but this model provides the greatest amount of feedback between the archaeological and ethnographic data—it also provides the most reliable explanation.
Notes


6 Adams, William H., p. 27.


11 Bronowski, Jacob, p. 429.


15 Adams, William H., p. 132.

17 Oswalt, Wendell H., P. C.


23 Adams, William H., p. 137.

Bibliography


Steward, Julian H., The Direct Historical Approach to Archaeology American Antiquity 7 1942.