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Saving the Past for Whom? Considerations for a New Conservation Ethic in Archaeology

This paper addresses ethical and professional issues in archaeology that simultaneously conjoin and segregate archaeologists and indigenous groups when concepts of ancestry, cultural affiliation, and ethnicity are at stake. These issues of past and present cultural identity derive much of their power from both tangible evidence and intangible concepts that we subsume under the rubrics of “heritage,” “cultural property,” and “cultural resources.” I propose that today’s archaeology must consider the benefits of an expanded “conservation ethic” to better guide future considerations of what we consider to be “cultural resources.” Our current archaeological conservation ethic, articulated primarily in the context of cultural resource legislation and

With the westward expansion of the railroad system, wealthy supporters of the American museum culture funded significant "expeditions" to bring evidence of past indigenous cultures to the Eastern museums and universities. Central to nearly every museum was the display of Native American material culture, both historic and prehistoric, often accompanied by texts mythologizing the "vanishing primitive peoples." These indigenous cultures, while certainly depopulated, were by no means gone. At the same time, the distribution of their ancestral sites and artifacts was geographically much more widespread than the extant indigenous cultures, and so public displays of the "past cultures" earned a central billing in the 19th century museum world.

The federal government was also an active agent in the early amassing of archaeological and ethnographic collections from Native American groups and ancestral sites. Preservationists within and outside the federal government pushed for both study and conservation of what most understood to be a dwindling native population. As a case in point, much of the early work of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) was driven by a national sentiment that the vanishing indigenous peoples would be assimilated, removed or extinct by the early 20th century.[7] The BAE, overseen by the Smithsonian Institution, was charged in 1879 with the responsibility of collecting material culture, linguistic data, and other information before the seemingly imminent demise of the first Americans. This "salvage" archeology and ethnology was published in annual reports detailing field research of BAE associates, volumes that still comprise some of the most important extant primary information on 19th century indigenous groups.

American archaeology grew as a profession to supply and service the acquisition of cultural materials for museum display and exchange. The earliest American archaeologists were commonly employed by museums, and their responsibilities ranged from leading collection-generating excavations and expeditions to the development of classification and typological systems for identifying, inventorying, and organizing the often overwhelming collections of historical and prehistoric material culture acquired by their institutions.[8] Ethical concerns arising from these contexts often focused on property-rights issues—who owned the lands from which material evidence of the past was being extracted? As James Snead details in his history of museums and archaeology in the Southwest, rival institutions from East Coast universities and metropolitan areas competed for access to rich archaeological sites across the Southwest.[9]

It was this rivalry, enmeshed with a significant cottage industry of local-level looting of archaeological sites, that set the stage for the first federal legislation to protect archaeological sites and collections, those things we refer to today as "cultural resources." The Antiquities Act of 1906[10] served as the first federal attempt to regulate the destruction of archaeological sites and artifacts by requiring that all excavation and collecting on federal lands had to be done under permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior.[11] Laurajane Smith traces the roots of federal control over significant materials, places, and contexts, as well as disciplinary control over cultural resources by archaeologists, to early laws such as the Antiquity Act.[12] The opportunity to amass and interpret the remains of the past was relegated to archaeologists through this early 20th century legislation, granted the National Park Service (NPS) authority to hire archaeological expertise to preserve existing park resources and also to acquire additional places of national historical significance.[14] As with the Antiquities Act, significant historic resources were conserved and held in trust as federal properties for the benefit of the American public.[15] The Act bolstered the role of the NPS, already the governmental arm in charge of the majority of our nation's historic and prehistoric sites. Similar to the Antiquities Act, the Historic Sites Act also recapitulated the conceptual integration of historical significance, the public good, and resource preservation as central themes in the treatment of the nation's past.

Just as much of the BAE's early work was driven by a sense of obligation to salvage remaining cultural insights on the "vanishing" Indian peoples, post-World War II archaeology included significant efforts to salvage archaeological resources threatened by water and land development programs. This is best exemplified in the River have on “significant, prehistorical, historical, or archaeological data.” Most importantly to the disciplinary expansion of archaeology, the AHPA provided that up to 1% of projects exceeding $10,000 could be used to fund any recovery or avoidance measures that would preserve these significant resources and their associated informational content.[19] This massive infusion of capital into archaeology meant that “salvage archaeology” was dead.[20] Federal funding made archaeology answerable to federal land and project managers and responsible to the public. Funding and responsibility for delivering palpable results to federal agencies finalized the transition of archaeologists from salvage specialists to cultural resource managers.

Archaeological codes of ethics, not surprisingly, were discussed and developed during the significant expansion of cultural resource management archaeology during the 1960s and 1970s. “Four Statements for Archaeology,” drafted by the SAA Committee on Ethics and Standards, became the first major statement on ethics and professional standards in American archaeology.[21] In addition to defining archaeology as a science “concerned with the reconstruction of past human life and culture,” the report emphasized that in all realms of professional activity, archaeologists were to “aim at preserving all recoverable information.”[22] As Alison Wylie points out, the primary message was that the archaeological profession was ethically charged with scientific understanding of the human past, and that all professional activities had to strive to preserve and conserve places, items, and information that comprise the publicly-shared cultural resources, the foundation for understanding and appreciating our common national heritage.[23]

By the 1980s the SAA had also fused scientific understanding and a firm conservation ethic into its own bylaws. The SAA staunchly advocated the inclusion of both professional and avocational practitioners of archaeology into its membership, but the SAA membership was compelled to practice archaeology that contributed to the scientific understanding of past cultures. Specifically, the Society operated “for exclusively scientific and educational purposes,” and promoted all legislation, regulations, and volunteer activities that would discourage the “loss of scientific knowledge” and preserve archaeology’s “access to sites and artifacts.”[24]

Archaeology’s Conservation Ethic

pipelines. But as Lipe points out, archaeology faced the problem that cultural resources are non-renewable, and so the discipline should focus on making “maximum longevity” the key to all decisions regarding the dwindling cultural resource base.[26]

The questions of why we should be concerned with cultural resource base longevity, and for what purposes we need the resource base, serve as important foundations for Lipe’s argument. The cultural resource base is the primary means for scientific archaeological research to understand past human behavior. Science, the predominant paradigm of understanding the past, dictates that material evidence of past behaviors should be preserved for future analysts to assess and restudy if necessary. Scientific knowledge rests not only in reference to observable patterns and predictable processes, but on the perpetuity of the evidence as well. The conservation ethic in archaeology, and scientific research in general, protects those materials and sites that serve as research “receipts,” those hard goods that everyone can check to insure that our explanations are based on palpable evidence. As it stands, the preservation ethic continues to apply to that wide class of places, structures, and objects that we define as “cultural resources.”

Lipe provides a detailed consideration of how societies perceive and value “cultural resources.” In his 1984 essay “Value and Meaning in Cultural Resources,” Lipe’s discussion of cultural resources explicitly focuses on hard goods, sites, and information. In other words, both materials *and* associated contexts surviving from the past are valued for their contribution to a society’s understanding of its historical identity. He details four primary types of value that contribute to the transformation of past material culture into a cultural resource. These include economic, aesthetic, associative/symbolic, and informational values, and any one or a combination of these can translate into whether a residue of the past gains or loses its role in the society as a cultural resource. This model of cultural resource production, preservation, and meaning relegates such things as traditional knowledge, oral historical traditions, folklore, and mythology to what Lipe calls “value contexts.” These value contexts exist as distinct from the resources themselves. The resources have a palpable reality, serving as tangible links to the past from which they

material remains has necessarily privileged the durable aspects of the past over indigenous oral historical accounts, leading to charges of inherent racism in the discipline's practice. By far the most sensitive issue, however, has been the debate over the disposition of human remains.[32] The issue of relevance is cast in stark contrast when scientific rationales for excavation and study of human remains are juxtaposed with indigenous indignation over the disturbance and desecration of ancestral human remains and associated burial materials.[33] It takes little explanation to highlight the long period of differential treatment of non-indigenous and indigenous human remains, not only in America but other places with colonial histories, such as Australia.[34]

The institutionalization of scientific archaeology, referred to in abbreviated form in the short history of the conservation ethic above, is also targeted in postprocessual critiques. One of the most expansive is Smith's recent treatise on archaeology as a "technology of government."[35] Drawing on sociological theoreticians such as Rose and Miller, archaeology has become a pawn of government through the legal and procedural regulation of the means by which the past is recovered, conceptualized, studied, and published by the archaeological discipline.[36] Smith traces the history of cultural resource management laws, practice and theory in both Australia and America, concluding that our highly regulated practice of archaeology has empowered government control of indigenous communities. In particular, Smith argues that the transition from "archaeology as salvage," which focused on the recovery and preservation of cultural resources, to "archaeology as information" disempowered indigenous groups because of the bifurcation of object from idea. Each time archaeologists assert their expertise as professionals, they legitimate governmental power and disempower indigenous communities.[37]

These thoughtful and often stinging critiques of modern archaeology have made significant points for consideration. Knowledge is contingent. That resounding rallying cry is brought to bear on most aspects of scientific understanding by postmodern critics. But this critique on the scientific focus in archaeology did not initiate with the recent postprocessual debate. In fact, the contingency of our knowledge of the past finds allies inside the "science" camp as well. As a prime example, the scholar most central to the conservation ethic, William Lipe, argued that cultural resource value depends on the "particular cultural, intellectual, historical and psychological frames of reference held by the particular individuals or groups involved."[38]

Our present practice of archaeology must continue in this tradition to reconsider not whether, but how, we best consider traditional knowledge as a cultural resource. As a case in point, I turn to a consideration of the question of cultural identity as it is currently approached as part of the worldwide concern with heritage politics. As I hope to show, our understanding of what constitutes a "cultural resource" within the classic conservation ethic in archaeology is unnecessarily narrow. A widening of our field of disciplinary vision to include traditional, "non-scientific" understandings of the past will provide a needed common ground for appreciating the negotiated nature of cultural identity. I believe that we can do so without having to diminish the continuing benefits of a science-informed archaeology. In short, knowledge of the past need not be

commonly references various forms of evidence that tie present groups to earlier peoples long since past. Ethnicity and cultural

Central to our interests in cultural identity and affiliation, it is significant that the main occupation of the site coincides with major regional abandonments and migrations documented in the archaeological record of the 13th through the 15th centuries. This was a time during which ancestral Native American groups undertook "significant and far-reaching transformations in land and resource use."[42] Large-scale changes in village size, layout, and the overall extent of ancestral Pueblo occupation of the Southwest target this period as a likely context for ethnogenesis and regional ethnic group differentiation.[43]

Archaeological investigations at the site over the past several years indicate extensive deep archaeological deposits at the site, containing a wide range of artifact classes, some of which are clearly from outside of the locality, indicating interaction with non-local groups. From an archaeological standpoint, there is great potential for a polyethnic mix of occupants at the settlement. Surface and subsurface remains of architecture show two distinct styles in different parts of the site, possibly due to the integration of non-local groups into the settlement during the site occupation. From the perspcalive of the indigenous communities in the area, the site is significant given the likelihood that it figures into traditional accounts related to ancestral population migrations, esoteric knowledge (songs,

Our discussions were purposefully open-ended, spanning different social, temporal, and spatial scales. At the local level we visited the site, discussed the motifs found in the rock art panels located near the site, and hiked to several possible shrine features surrounding the settlement. On the regional level we discussed migration histories and traditional oral historical accounts of relationships between the site and sacred locations in and around the Rio Puerco and Rio Grande drainages. Participating teams also spent a full day at the Maxwell Museum at the University of New Mexico, viewing and discussing archaeological materials recently excavated from Chaves-Hummingbird Pueblo. At the end of each field and museum collaboration, each group of experts was asked whether there were cultural affiliation ties that linked their tribe to the ancestral occupants of Chaves-Hummingbird Pueblo. If the answer was “yes,” each was asked to identify the “past identifiable group” to which they were affiliated. A significant amount of time was spent talking about the various lines of evidence that each individual brought to bear on the question of identity and affiliation.

Affiliation Findings: Shared Histories and Landscapes

Each group did believe that there were cultural affiliation ties linking the occupants of Chaves-Hummingbird to their respective tribe. Most significant to this discussion, however, were the real and varied differences in the criteria brought to bear on the question of of affiliation with the site and its locale resided in the form and location of the nearby shrines, traditional songs that described the site locale, traditional land use practices, and rock art motifs. Specifically, the site's location on the eastern boundary of the Acoma archaeological culture province, a landscape perspective derived from long term collaboration between Acoma and archaeologists such as A.E. Dittert, figured heavily into the assessment of cultural affiliation ties between Acoma and Chaves-Hummingbird.

Some of the supporting lines of evidence fall squarely into the traditional categories of archaeological cultural resources. But it is safe to say that ceramics, stone tools, and other archaeologically-were able to review on site and at the Maxwell Museum. The glaze-painted redware ceramic tradition followed by the ancestral potters at Chaves-Hummingbird has its origins in the Zuni region of western New Mexico and eastern Arizona, an archaeologically-based observation of which the Zuni experts were well aware. The massed architectural style observed on site and through site maps was also significant to the Zuni collaborators. This architectural style, definitive of ancestral and modern Pueblo communities, along with the open plaza spaces, was a strong line of evidence of an ancestral Zuni connection to the site.

The Zuni found additional affiliation evidence in a suite of materials viewed at the Maxwell Museum that a few members of the expert team identified as ritual paraphernalia. These include quartz crystals, yellow and red ochre, large projectile points, altar stones, and stone concretions. These items figure into the medicine society rituals that two of the experts participated in. Symbols of this same society, In the final discussion of cultural affiliation within and between Pueblo groups, none of the groups or individuals had any problem with the fact that the other pueblos had also asserted affiliation ties to the site. In fact, each group fully expected that to be the case given the rich traditional history of migration, integration, and disintegration that exists at all four pueblos involved in this research. The interconnected histories of these and other pueblos is a reality of the southwestern cultural landscape.

In summary, a comparison of the relevance accorded to archaeological and traditional knowledge by only two of the Pueblo communities illustrates the diverse range of information, perspectives, and evidence that each group of experts brought to bear on the issue of cultural affiliation. As with the conceptualization of identity itself, there are multiple avenues for constituting a group's past, so we need not waste ink or debate over whether there is a formula or standard approach for ascertaining the relevant links that allow stakeholders in "identity politics" to go from cultural resource to cultural affiliation in any regularized fashion. As with the specific culture history constituted from within and from without for modern culture groups, relevance of cultural resources to the question of past cultural identity and origins is necessarily an open-ended inquiry that must remain so in order to give the sufficient latitude for understanding the links between past and present.

Traditional Knowledge, Cultural Resources, and Secrecy

I have focused on a central concept in modern archaeology, the conservation ethic, to make a case for expanding our present conceptualization of what should constitute a "cultural resource." Recent federal legislation, particularly the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGRPA), provides new opportunities to remedy limitations in archaeology's conceptualization perspectiv 24.7 (ral)n R4tce."

consideration of the roles of cultural resources in the interpretation of the past.

Archaeologists are not the only arbiters of what should be considered as a cultural resource. Our present state of flux can benefit all indigenous groups in their consideration of what constitutes a cultural resource within their own communities, or other nations for that matter. NAGPRA explicitly identifies a number of sources of information that can inform on ties of cultural affiliation

As discussed by Peter Whiteley, traditional knowledge has been suspect as a source of archaeologically relevant information.[51] As enjoyed and appreciated by later generations. The important quality here is that this is a "shared" responsibility, and at the same time, it is the archaeologist's responsibility to share these resources with the society at large. The justification for conservation is that the costs of preserving and conserving borne by our present society is an investment that will be realized by future generations.

Some of these traditional cultural resources are not meant to be publicly accessible or knowable. There is a segmentation and differentiation of knowledge, access, and action that is part of much Pueblo religious life. Lipe characterizes cultural resources in the archaeological realm as those that necessarily exist within the public sphere, enabling all to encounter the cultural resources that provide "the tangible and direct links with the past."[53] Indigenous communities commonly practice a less publicly accessible form of cultural resource stewardship.

Given the reality of secrecy and limitations on the distribution of traditional knowledge in some contexts, our conservation ethic must be flexible with respect to the specificity of the information we seek to preserve as part of the cultural resource record. Specific esoteric knowledge inherent in traditional accounts often needs to be revealed to only a small portion of a community, generally those who have been through ritual initiation. This may lead to a limited preservation, but we are bound by mutual respect to support such a limited preservation ethic in the interest of the community holding the traditional knowledge.

For example, the Acoma experts' responses to our request for specific information were clear. Traditional knowledge remained traditional and effective by not sharing it with non-Acoma individuals. Identity with ancestral places, peoples, and events was and is essential to the internal integrity of the Acoma people. In that regard, their identity does not hinge on the agreement or disagreement of external groups on the matter. This is internally negotiated identity, and the secrecy surrounding the details of this negotiated identity preserves Acoma identity. As explained by Fidel Lorenzo, the secrecy is not out of defiance of what other groups or individuals may think about Acoma identity and ancestry, it is simply out of respect for those people in Acoma, past and present, who serve as the stewards of this important legacy.

This is stewardship of cultural resources that differs from that espoused in our professional ethics in archaeology. The SAA code of ethics charges us with responsible stewardship of cultural resources, including full public disclosure of our research findings, interpretations, and associated data.[54] Our scientific inquiry requires that we share any and all pertinent information, not only so that others can assess the strength of our ideas but also because much of our support, funding, and archaeological resources derive from public (federal and state) contexts. This stewardship can and should co-exist with the existence of both agreement and disagreement on significance and explanatory approaches.

This brings the general discussion of the conservation ethic and cultural resources back to the topic of cultural identity. I want to urge our diverse and sometime contentious discipline to reconsider some of the essential tensions between science and cultural understanding, particularly with respect to the conceptualization of cultural patrimony and identity. Cultural identity is not a static label. Identity is one possible result of social negotiations between individuals and groups, negotiations that situate rights, responsibilities, and resources in a social context. At points during the negotiations, those groups and individuals involved can agree on an identity as a valid classification relative to other culturally identifiable groups. There is no end point to the definition of cultural identity, even when dealing with ancestral groups, since identity is always relational. Identity can be a classification, but as such is a “snapshot” of the social context within which social negotiations are taking place.

Conclusions

We are at an historical juncture in archaeology, when dominant archaeological perspectives on the past are questioned by a wide array of critics, and responses are emanating not just from within the field, but from indigenous communities, federal agencies, and an involved public. Disciplinary criticism is not necessarily unique, since all disciplines undergo scrutiny from within and outside. The importance of the current context is that many of the avenues for understanding, inclusion, and collaboration are not only present, but are included in legislative guidelines for considering issues of repatriation, group identity, and cultural affiliation. Never before has there been a better opportunity to share the past in order to better understand the present.

We need to expand the conservation ethic, which presently refers primarily to material heritage, to include a wider frame of reference for establishing the significance of intangible cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. This should not be accomplished, however, by decreasing the contribution that archaeology can continue to make in understanding the past. This expansion of the conservation ethic depends in large part on a shared respect for different interpretive approaches to the past. The shared respect does not necessarily mean back to her own suggestion, incorporation assumes that there is an infrastructure of knowledge that is seeking to integrate additional knowledge into an already established worldview.

Collaboration fosters questions that can be approached from a variety of perspectives, and allows each perspective to bring its own worldview and infrastructure of explanation to those questions. With collaboration, agreement on conclusions is not a precondition, and often not even an end product. But even with disagreement, collaboration allows the latitude for those who disagree to understand why they have not come to a common solution. To quote one of our experts from Laguna Pueblo on our first day of collaborative research, “In the end, we don’t have to agree on everything everyone says over the next two days, do we?”[56] As Michael Brown eloquently summarizes in his book, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, intellectual property and esoteric traditional knowledge are always relational in nature.[57] Those interpersonal and intercultural relationships that are aspects of cultural good. A complete archive of research data will be provided for each participating pueblo community, including field

Figure 2: Aerial photo of Chaves-Hummingbird Pueblo with relative position of adobe room blocks indicated.

Figure 3: Northern Roomblock
Figure 4: Eastern Roomblock

Figure 5: Glaze-painted bowl from Chaves-Hummingbird Pueblo with Knifewing Figure

Endnotes

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21 J.L. Champe, D.S. Byers, E. Evans, et al, “Four Statements for Archaeology,” *American Antiquity* 27: 137-139.

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The leaders of Southern Methodist University believe that a university does not fully discharge its responsibility to its students and to the community at large if it hands out knowledge (and the power which that knowledge eventually yields) without posing questions about its responsible uses. Through the Cary M. Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility, SMU strives to foster the moral education and public responsibilities of those whom it empowers by:

- Supporting faculty research, teaching, and writing in ethics that cross