

# Timeless time - Africa in the world

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This chapter examines a persistent contradiction in Western representations of Africa. The continent is imagined simultaneously as the place of human and cultural origins and as a region outside history: a timeless landscape of nature, primitivism and arrested development. Archaeology has been central to the production of this contradiction. Although archaeological research has demonstrated the depth, complexity and innovation of Africa's past, its theories, institutions and representational practices have often reproduced the colonial assumptions that deny Africa historical agency.

This conception of Africa has a long genealogy. Medieval travel narratives, religious cosmologies and early maps placed Africa at the margins of the known world, associating it with excessive heat, sexual disorder, cannibalism, fabulous wealth and monstrous forms of humanity. Exploration and colonial cartography gradually gave this imagined space geographical precision. The modern map of Africa, divided by straight borders and colonial territories, became the material expression of European conquest.

Archaeology developed within this colonial geography. Its collections, intellectual traditions and scholarly networks followed the linguistic and territorial divisions of empire. Nineteenth-century evolutionary theory placed European civilisation at the summit of human development and interpreted contemporary African societies as survivals of earlier stages in Europe's own past. Archaeological evidence therefore accompanied colonial expansion, providing material support for the claim that imperialism brought progress and enlightenment to a continent incapable of generating civilisation independently.

The independence movements of the mid-twentieth century transformed this field. New African states required histories capable of sustaining national consciousness and repudiating colonial claims that Africa possessed no past worthy of the name. Archaeology became part of this project through universities, national museums and public education. But these postcolonial developments remained constrained by inherited institutions, economic dependency and limited resources.

The continuing popular representation of Africa as timeless cannot be explained simply as residual ignorance. It is sustained by archaeology's own epistemology: its repeated retreat into empirical description, typology and the apparent self-sufficiency of material evidence. The resolution of this contradiction requires reflective practice. Archaeologists must acknowledge that interpretations of the past are inseparable from the historical, political and institutional conditions in which knowledge is produced.

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## Timeless time: Africa and the world

MARTIN HALL

### The art in the artefact

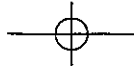
In 1995, the Royal Academy's exhibition *Africa — The Art of a Continent* opened in London. There were more than eight hundred objects, ranging from southern Africa to the Mediterranean and from five thousand years ago to the present. In the words of the curator, Tom Phillips, 'it is a privilege to celebrate for the first time, in these rooms, the fertile contribution to the visual culture of the world from the whole of this vast and infinitely various continent; and to make here a praise song for Africa' (Phillips 1995, 20). For activist and academic Cornel West, 'this monumental exhibition is unprecedented in the history of the art world. Never before has there been gathered such a rich and vast array of African art-objects and artefacts from such a broad timespan. And rarely has any exhibition embraced the artistic treasures of the whole of Africa, from Egypt to Ife to Great Zimbabwe' (West 1995, 9).

Yet, despite such accolades, *Africa — The Art of a Continent* provoked hostile responses. Simon Jenkins of *The Times* wrote:

On Monday night I put on my best suit and attacked the African art show, talk of the town at the Royal Academy. I was immediately stumped. Outside were a dozen prancing Zulu war drummers, skimpily clad in raffia briefs, beaming and whooping at the passing guests. The guests had no idea how to react. Were these renegade militants, satirising the white man's image of Africa? Or were they one of the exhibits, 'performance art' courtesy of the Bank of Ulundi. Should we throw coloured beads, or raise a fist in salute? Ambassadorial limousines cruised the forecourt menacingly, as if about to spew AK47s and mow us all down. . . (Jenkins 1995)

Jenkins was no happier inside the Royal Academy where, in the matter of Art, Africa was just not up to standard:

I can appreciate a well-crafted meat platter from KwaZulu or an intricate Nigerian Igbo-Ukwu bowl. The decoration is pretty. I can see that the ubiquitous masks may have served their purpose in amusing or horrifying the communities for whose



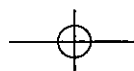
religious beliefs they had meaning. But put them on a pedestal, light them and declare them to be something quite different — art — and my eye judges them as such, and judges the selector. The daubs and rock paintings and carvings are awesome echoes of the past. But most of the exhibits are 'found objects' of the past century. They are crude and — a word detested by the politically correct — primitive. . . . (Jenkins 1995)

Jenkins' compatriot, Richard Dowden of *The Spectator*, came to the same conclusion: 'Is there any art in the continent? You may pronounce a Zulu platter beautiful but it is only a meat dish. Can it therefore be art? You may say Kente cloth from Ghana is magnificent but it is only Asante proverbs woven into cloth through signs and symbols. . .' (Dowden 1995). Dowden then went on to offer his readers a paragraph of potted history which let them off the legacy of four centuries of invasion, pillage and plunder. For him, 'the greatest problem of all' is, again, 'political correctness':

The PC line on Africa is that it was the Garden of Eden before the Europeans pitched up and ruined it. Since then everything wrong with Africa, from genocide in Rwanda to drought in Sudan, is blamed on outsiders . . . If it were true that African culture had been wiped out by imperialism, Africans would simply be copying European art, building neo-classical houses, painting like Rembrandt and writing like Jane Austen. But Africans are not doing this. The fact is that Africa survived imperialism rather well. Its spirit was not crushed. Its culture and society, especially the family, remain as strong as ever. Faced with imperialism, war or drought, Africa falls back on its greatest strength: survival. Conservative but adaptable, Africa absorbed the impact of European intervention and did well out of it. The Europeans, so full of plans and dreams for Africa, were finally defeated, their plans and dreams swallowed up in Africa's mysterious maw and transformed into something quite different. (Dowden 1995)

Commentaries such as these cast Africa's history and culture as, at best, an amusing side-show, a vast colourful craft market, a mass of people whose purpose is merely to survive. Such positions are hardly new. They are the millennial version of the sentiments that made an industry from Africa's exoticism, whether early modern fables of Prester John and the Queen of Sheba, Rider Haggard's wildly successful novels such as *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, Wilbur Smith's airport blockbusters (*Sunbird*) or Disney's *Lion King* (Hall 1995a, 1995b, 1996).

Such reactions are profoundly ironic. It is as if Africa's material world — its treasure house of work in all conceivable media — has been used up. Having inspired Napoleon and droves of adventurers after him to plunder the Nile valley, the British to raid Benin for its bronzes, and the Belgians to strip the Congo for King Leopold II's collections, Africa has no 'art' that can satisfy British taste. The turning point for Western art may have been Pablo Picasso's visit, in 1907, to the Musée d'Ethnographie in the Palais de Trocadéro and the force and form that he saw in African masks (Duncan 1968), but this cuts no ice with Simon Jenkins — such sources of inspiration



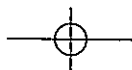
have no place in the Academy. Europe's derivations from Africa are 'art' but their raw materials — the primary sources from which they are drawn — are archive. In a way, responses such as these are the purest form of colonialism, Franz Fanon's robbery of the soul (Fanon 1963).

But such reactions are also strange. It would hardly be credible to argue that European perceptions of Africa are frozen in some sort of false consciousness that would yield comments from a high-brow journalist at the end of the twentieth century that are indistinguishable from the popular fiction of a hundred years earlier. This small example of the Royal Academy's exhibition introduces a contradiction that will frame my argument in the rest of this chapter. This contradiction can be given form by turning to the programme notes that accompanied the show. In the catalogue, the curator tells us that his aim was to present Africa 'as it really is', stripped of the influence of the outside world. Nothing that was syncretic or cosmopolitan, nothing that diluted the strong streams of Africa's 'authentic' artistic traditions, would be allowed into the show (Phillips 1995). Such 'contemporary work' was for satellite exhibitions, scheduled for other venues in London. The consequence was the depiction of a continent frozen in an 'ethnographic present', a relative chronology in which the absolute dates of objects in the show varied widely from place to place (from early dynastic Egypt in the north to the ninth-century AD Lydenburg sculptures in the south), but in which the time horizon was always before Europe's 'influence'. African cultures could be seen to affect one another, but not to be influenced, or to exert influence, beyond the continent's periphery. Africa was a continent in a glass jar, an unearthed spectacle, at which the Academy's visitors could gaze and wonder (Hall 1996).

This, then, is the contradiction. Africa is the 'timeless continent': Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the apocalyptic encounter of civilization and its nemesis (Achebe 1988). It is Karl Jung's 'collective unconscious', the unchanging baseline of the human psyche (Jung 1973) and Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1954), the herds of antelope sweeping across the Serengeti. But at the same time, Africa is the continent of origins: the pre-colonial cities of Great Zimbabwe and Jenne-jeno, mathematics, architecture and astronomy in early Egypt, animal husbandry and crop cultivation, artistic representation. Above all else, it is the continent in which humanity itself originated. How can Africa be both at the hub of history, and out of time?

## Colonial days

But what is Africa? For the commentators such as Richard Dowden, Africa was always there, 'conservative but adaptable', albeit with a 'mysterious maw' (Dowden 1995). A reading of the exhibition catalogue would have pointed to a more complex situation. Here is Kwame Anthony Appiah:



Take, first, 'Africa': through the long ages of human cultural life in the continent, and, more particularly, in the half dozen or so millennia since the construction of the first great architectural monuments of the Nile Valley, most people in the continent have lived in societies that defined both self and other by ties of blood or power. It would never have occurred to most of the Africans in this long history to think that they belonged to a larger human group defined by a shared relationship to the African continent . . . Only recently has the idea of Africa come to figure importantly in the thinking of many Africans, and those that took up this idea got it, by and large, from European culture. X (Appiah 1995, 21-240)

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Appiah's dissection of the idea of Africa is part of a stream of critical writing that questions the assumption that the unitary geography, history and culture of the continent is a given — that it provides a frame of comparison with 'Europe', 'Asia' or 'America'. V.Y. Mudimbe has explored Africa as 'invention' and 'idea', while Simon Gikandi identifies an 'Africanist' style of writing, akin to Edward Said's orientalism, in which the continent is inevitably a place of forests and primitive peoples (Gikandi 1996; Mudimbe 1988, 1994; Said 1985).

What was to become 'Africa' started as a vague shape of rumours, assumptions and prejudices in religious and popular early modern tales, manuscripts and early books. Sailors and settlers carried conceptual baggage along with trinkets for trade and armaments for subjection — prior concepts moulded the relationships that developed between the colonizers and the indigenous communities they were to encounter (Greenblatt 1991). Dante's *Divine Comedy*, written for a popular audience, cast the earth as a sphere, solid except for the cavity of Hell. In the south, in Africa, 'Garamantes' coped with the heat by going naked (Binyon 1952). The widely popular *Mandeville's Travels* saw the world in much the same way (Moseley 1983). Available in every major European language by the end of the fourteenth century, the fictitious 'Sir John Mandeville' described his travels away from Jerusalem, the centre of the world. Here are the parahuman inhabitants of 'Lamary', living under the 'Antarctic Star':

In [Lamary] it is extremely hot; the custom there is for men and women to go completely naked and they are not ashamed to show themselves as God made them . . . In that land there is no marriage between man and woman; all the women of that land are common to every man . . . When women are delivered of a child, they give it to whom they want of the men who have slept with them. And in the same way the land is common property. So one year a man has one house, another year another; each man takes what pleases him, now here, now there. For all things are common, as I said, corn and other goods too; nothing is locked up, and every man is as rich as another. But they have an evil custom among them, for they will eat human flesh more gladly than any other. Nevertheless, the land is abundant enough in meat and fish and corn, and also gold and silver and other goods. Merchants bring children there to sell, and the people of the country buy them. Those that are plump they eat;



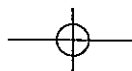
those that are not plump they feed up and fatten, and then kill and eat them. And they say it is the best and sweetest flesh in the world. (Moseley 1983, 127–8)

Such antipodean images were closely associated with heat and suffering. Dante characterized India — the extreme east of the known world — as a land where the sand was too hot to walk upon. The Third Ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell had the same burning sand. Here, the sexually deviant — the 'violent against nature' — were condemned to walk forever. Burning sand signified the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, while 'Libya's sand' was associated with the serpents and 'breeds so strange beside' in the Seventh Chasm of the Eighth Circle (Sayers 1949, 160). Such tumbled confusions of images must have been prominent in the minds of the lowliest seventeenth-century sailor as Africa was sighted on the port bow. These vague shapes took ever more specific form in a series of cartographies. Descriptive fragments were brought together in early travel accounts and influenced early medieval maps and charts, while the cartography of the continent was given clearer form from the closing years of the fifteenth century with the first Portuguese voyages of discovery (Boxer 1957; Crone 1968). With time, the Catalan atlases, with their strange, elliptical representations of unrecognizable land masses surrounding Europe and the Mediterranean, were replaced by Ortelian globes and Mercator's Projection (Crone 1968). By 1588 Livio Sanuto could describe Table Mountain from his knowledge of travellers' tales, bringing together contemporary cartography and a long-standing mythological tradition: 'Upon the top of this promontory Nature . . . hath formed here a great plain, pleasant in situation, which with the fragrant herbs, variety of flowers, and flourishing verdure of all things, seems a terrestrial paradise' (van Wyk Smith 1988, 9). Although Ortelius's and Mercator's new globes did not map the location of Paradise, their contemporaries knew that it existed and, throughout the following centuries of colonial expansion, sailors setting out from Europe could expect that an unplanned deviation from the established sea lanes could bring them to the Island of Purgatory or to other celebrated lands.

This creation of Africa from the periphery snaked into the interior, following the lines of rivers and other routes. On the way, new observations were made and trophies collected, yielding in time to the systematic procedures of collecting and classifying that are the distinctive mark of the discipline of Archaeology. Alongside the creation of such 'travelling epistemologies' (Carter 1988) Africa was segmented into colonial divisions — the spoils of Empire — with boundaries that followed lines of latitude and longitude, or of major topographic features, reflecting the histories of disputes between European powers. The end result was the modern map of Africa — a graphic representation of a century of high colonialism and five hundred years of European settlement, and the 'invented continent'.

This colonial geography framed and directed the intellectual development of archaeology in Africa, and has left an ineluctable impression on the archive of knowledge about

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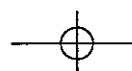


the past. Language had a major influence. West Africa was the colonial territory of Britain, Belgium and France, and colonial officials who became interested in collecting artefacts corresponded with museums in London, Brussels and Paris, relating in turn again to different intellectual traditions of archaeological interpretation. Distribution maps of archaeological sites in southern Africa show sharp declines along the eastern boundaries of South Africa, as amateur collectors working in South Africa came to the borders of Portugal's colony, Moçambique. Studies of rock paintings in South-West Africa (now Namibia) were published in German, while studies of rock art belonging to the same pan-San pre-colonial tradition, but located in neighbouring Botswana, were published in English. In some cases, politics played an equally influential role. The most striking example here, of course, is the relationship between South Africa and the rest of the continent. Thus *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns* (Shaw *et al.* 1993), presented as a comprehensive overview of the continent's past, contained virtually nothing on the archaeology of the south. The history of South Africa's pre-colonial people was eradicated in punishment for the sins of their own oppressors.

The consequence of these engagements is a rich discourse of texts and collections that links the earliest expeditions with today's museums, and recent publications with their antecedents. The first part of the continent to attract the West's attention was Egypt. Early interest was given great impetus by Napoleon's invasion in 1798, and the description of Egyptian antiquities, published in the *Description de l'Égypte* between 1809 and 1813 (Fagan 1977). In Martin Bernal's words:

The whole Expedition is a fascinating turning point in European attitudes to the East. In many ways the elaborate surveys, maps and drawings, and the stealing of objects and cultural monuments to embellish France, was an early example of the standard pattern of studying and objectifying through scientific enquiry that became a hallmark of European imperialism and a basis of the 19th-century 'Orientalism' described so well by Edward Said. On the other hand, there were still many traces of the older attitude towards Egypt, and among the scientific members of the Expedition there was the belief that, in Egypt, they could learn essential facts about the world and their own culture and not just exotica to complete Western knowledge — and domination — of Africa and Asia. (Bernal 1991, 184)

Similarly, collections of artefacts were made from the early years of colonial possession and settlement in other areas, and were based on the same premises that inspired archaeologists in nineteenth-century Europe: Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833) and the principle of uniformitarianism, C.J. Thomsen's technological phases, and the interpretations of stone tools made by pioneers such as Boucher de Perthes. The evolutionary synthesis that was brought together in Darwin's *Origins of Species* in 1859 provided a basis for recognizing human fossils and stimulated the classification of living societies, which were seen as representative of the various stages that European civilization had passed through before attaining its cultural superiority. Some of the earliest descriptions of



African antiquities outside Egypt came from Senegal in 1851 (de Barros 1990), and from the Eastern Cape, South Africa, from where Thomas Holden Bowker made a collection in 1858 (Deacon 1990). The first known collections from East Africa came somewhat later, in 1893 (Robertshaw 1990). It was generally assumed that these collections must be the evidence for prehistoric migrations into Africa from Europe. Such social evolutionism was a major buttress for colonial ideologies. Expansion into Africa and the destruction of indigenous customs and systems of social organization could be justified by arguing that Europeans brought preordained progress and enlightenment to the 'dark continent'. Assembling the material evidence of this inevitable social evolution was the book that accompanied the sword of justice and progress.

One man with a particularly strong sense of the mission of Empire was Cecil John Rhodes. Immortalized in stone beneath Livio Sanuto's Table Mountain, he gazes northwards dreaming, perhaps, of joining the Cape to Cairo in a mass of British imperial possessions. In his lifetime, Rhodes sought to found his vision for the future in an archaeology of the past. In 1890 Mashonaland, later to become Southern Rhodesia and then Zimbabwe, was occupied by the British South Africa Company and Rhodes inherited a tradition of speculation that stretched back to the earliest colonial days.

The Portuguese had been the first to establish permanent garrisons on the East African coast, and in the 1530s the first trading posts were established inland, along the Zambezi river. It was accepted as fact that a fabulously wealthy Christian king, Prester (or Priest) John, lived somewhere in the interior. These stories were run together with myths about the lost wealth of the Biblical characters King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. A travel account called *Da Asia*, which had first been circulated in 1552, summarized the prevalent myths of the time. *Da Asia* told of abandoned gold mines and stone buildings (known as 'Symbaoe') reported from the interior, and built on instructions from Prester John. Prester John's kingdom was seen as the source of the gold that had previously reached coastal towns through indirect trade. Laborious expeditions, with men sweltering in heavy suits of armour, weakened by fever and picked off by defending tribesmen, were invariably disastrous (Hall 1996). For two centuries more, expeditions such as these ended only in frustration. But in 1871 tangible evidence at last came to light. Carl Mauch, an energetic and credulous explorer, came across the ruins of Great Zimbabwe. Applying a tenuous chain of reasoning, Mauch noted that splinters of wood from a cross-beam were very similar to the wood of his pencil, indicating that both were cedar. He believed that this was conclusive:

It can be taken as a fact that the wood which we obtained actually is cedar-wood and from this that it cannot come from anywhere else but from the Libanon (sic). Furthermore only the Phoenicians could have brought it here; further Salomo (Solomon) used a lot of cedar-wood for the building of the temple and of his palaces: further: including here the visit of the Queen of Seba (sic) and, considering Zimbaye or Zimbaë or Simbaë written in Arabic, (of Hebrew I understand nothing), one gets



the result that the great woman who built the *rondeau* could have been none other than the Queen of Seba. (Burke 1969, 190)

Mashonaland came under Rhodes' control in 1890, and he immediately became obsessed with the place. He acquired Mauch's finds and equipped expeditions to dig for evidence. In 1891, the first archaeological expedition to Great Zimbabwe left England, under Rhodes' patronage and with the support of the Royal Geographic Society and the British Association for the Advancement of Science. It was led by Theodore Bent, who published the results of his excavations as *The Ruined Cities of Mashonaland* (Bent 1969). Bent's book initiated the ambivalent combination of collision and collusion with popular mythology that was to characterize subsequent archaeological work at Great Zimbabwe. He dismissed popular opinion and asserted the need for proper scientific work if the truth was to be found. 'From Fort Victoria', he reported,

came over during our stay a whole host of visitors to see how we were getting on. Prospecting parties going northwards tarried at Fort Victoria for a rest, and came over to see the wondrous ruins of Zimbabwe. Englishmen, Dutchmen from the Transvaal, Germans, all sorts and conditions of men came to visit us, and as temporary custodians of the ruins we felt it our duty to personally conduct parties over them, thereby hearing all sorts and conditions of opinions as to the origin of the same ... The names of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were on everybody's lips, and have become so distasteful to us that we never expect to hear them again without an involuntary shudder. (Bent 1969, 64)

But although Bent dismissed King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba from his stage, he retained and strengthened the structure of the mythology that had sustained them for so many years. Bent used his authority as an orientalist, buttressed by the expert evidence of Professor Muller of Vienna, 'the great Austrian authority on Southern Arabian archaeology', to show that Great Zimbabwe was the work of Sabaen Arabs, garrisoned in enemy territory and mining gold for Mediterranean and Asian merchants. The influence of Phoenicia was marked by the evidence for phallic worship, while the 'Temple' served as a solar calendar. Proof of northern connections was given in the orientation of the monoliths on the Temple walls. 'It is remarkable', Bent felt, 'that only stars of the northern hemisphere seem to have been observed at Zimbabwe ... This, of course, points to a northern origin for the people...' (Bent 1969, 174). Bent saw this early Mashonaland civilization as overrun by the dark forces of barbarism; the ancestors of the 'Karanga' whose past, 'like all Kaffir combinations', was a story of 'a hopeless state of disintegration', and who were little more than animals, to be classed together with 'a tribe of baboons', 'more closely allied to one another than they are to the race of white men, who are now appropriating the territory of both' (Bent 1969, 33, 43).

Thus, by the end of the century, archaeology was established in Africa, but as an accomplice in colonial expansion and domination. Thus G.W. Stow, summarizing his



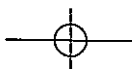
view of the continent's past, could write in 1905 that 'the seething mass of equatorial life' was hemmed in by Mediterranean civilization to the north, 'until amid internal heavings and internecine wars another storm wave rose which, beaten from the north, would naturally expend its fury in the opposite direction . . . until they came into contact with strange white faced men still more invincible than they imagined themselves to be, against whom, with many minor fluctuations, the tidal wave of rude barbarism beat in vain' (Stow 1905, 233-5).

Rhodes' sponsorship of Bent and others resulted in work at Great Zimbabwe that was sufficiently careless and cavalier to attract a backlash from the British Association, which sent first David Randall-MacIver to investigate the site, and then Gertrude Caton-Thompson (Garlake 1973; Hall 1996; Randall-MacIver 1906). Caton-Thompson had a close knowledge of Egyptian archaeology and brought a fierce empiricism to the Zimbabwe controversy, basing her interpretations on a close reading stratigraphy and the relative chronology of key assemblages. She has been widely celebrated as a pioneer of modern archaeological methods in sub-Saharan Africa and, in her 1931 monograph on Great Zimbabwe, asserted that she had 'no germ of preconceived ideas as to the ruins' origin and age', was 'unconcerned with speculations', and was 'unencumbered by a priori hypotheses as to who might have done what, who sacrificed to the morning star, and who worshipped the new moon'. These, she declared, were 'subjects which have no place at all in the earlier chapters of archaeological research, and which lead, unless firmly tethered by chronological data, to wildernesses of deductive error' (Caton-Thompson 1931, 2).

A suitable marker for the culmination of this first phase in Africa's archaeology was the formative meeting of the Pan African Association of Archaeology in 1947, when the archaeologists of diverse colonies converged on Nairobi to discuss sequences, relative dates and nomenclature — all structured within the invented boundaries of a continent divided as the spoils of conquest (Hall 1996).

For those gathered in Nairobi this must have seemed like the beginning of an era of scientific collaboration, following years in which the world had been at war. Archaeology was becoming established on a professional basis and, in the south, the South African Archaeological Society had been formed and the first edition of the *South African Archaeological Bulletin* had been published. However, the contradiction of being both in and out of time is already evident in the way in which the continent's archaeology was being written. On the one hand, it was clear that Africa's archaeology was crucial in understanding the origin of humanity. Although the certainty that would be provided by absolute dates was still some decades away, hominid discoveries in both South and East Africa had already marked the continent as a laboratory for Darwinian projections for human evolution. Prior to the Nairobi meeting Le Gros Clark (Professor of Anatomy at Oxford) visited South Africa to view the Taung, Sterkfontein and Kromdraai fossils. From an initially sceptical position he was convinced of their authenticity (Tobias 1978).

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But, on the other hand, Africa was invariably denied a history of its own. Its archaeology was shoehorned into Europe's typological schema and the assumption was inevitable that all cultural innovations in Africa were derived from the north. This had been well illustrated in a double contradiction that had occurred when the British Association had met in Johannesburg to hear Gertrude Caton-Thompson's report on Great Zimbabwe. Raymond Dart, famous for his discovery and identification of the Taung skull — achievements that won for him the justified status as the originator of palaeoanthropology in Africa — was so incensed by Caton-Thompson's argument for an African origin for Great Zimbabwe that he was reported to have stormed from the room (Garlake 1973). And Caton-Thompson herself, in her 1931 publication of the site, supported her case for an African origin by the observation that Great Zimbabwe's walls were built so badly that they must have been constructed by Africans. In her own words, 'The architecture at Zimbabwe, imitative apparently of a daub prototype, strikes me as essentially the product of an infantile mind, a pre-logical mind, a mind which having discovered the way of making or doing a thing goes on childishly repeating the performance regardless of incongruity' (Caton-Thompson 1931, 103).

This, then, was the tenor of archaeology's contribution to the creation of an imagined continent. It was rendered particularly powerful because of archaeology's ability to add material substance to history. Through mapping out the distribution of 'cultures' from pottery and stone tools, and the form of early towns and cities through foundations and standing walls, archaeology made Africa's past far more real than words alone. This, though, meant that the colonial geography of the continent, and the historical assumptions of archaeologists, were inscribed definitively into the emerging narrative of the past. This double bind was perceptively shown by Desmond Clark, himself one of the pioneers of archaeology in Africa, in his monumental *Atlas of African Prehistory*. In seeking correlations between the distribution of artefact types and environmental factors, Clark discovered that one of the few causal factors for patterning in 'cultures' was the distribution of archaeologists (Clark 1967). In effect, archaeological interpretations were laid down as another sedimentary layer in the long-standing discourse through which 'Africa' was created in the West.

## African archaeologies

Africa may have seemed secure for continuing exploration in colonial style when the Pan African Association was formed in 1947. Any such expectation was short-lived. In 1948, the National Party came to power in South Africa and rapidly embarked on its policy of legislated racial segregation. The Pan African Association had planned to meet next in Johannesburg, but this was shelved; it would be more than 40 years before archaeologists from the whole continent would be able to meet again. At the same time,



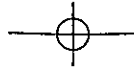
independence movements were gaining impetus across the continent, resulting in the creation of nation states from former colonial territories. Such 'winds of change' had radical implications for archaeology in Africa. New countries needed new histories and a consciousness of the past that would build national identity and foster pride in the past. National and regional museums — legacies from colonial days — were supplemented by new universities, themselves often closely linked to the project of fostering national identity. Programmes were set up at European and North American universities to train and qualify African archaeologists. In contrast the south, as alarmed by these winds of change as others were excited, bunkered down in a siege mentality in which there was little place for popular nationalism. The consequence of these changing circumstances was a variety of new archaeologies that addressed concerns that were often very different from those of high colonialism.

One of the striking features of colonial archaeology in Africa, whether in Egypt or in Gertrude Caton-Thompson's Great Zimbabwe, is that the 'native' was confined to the role of passive subject or ethnographic informant: the purpose of archaeology in Africa is not to write history 'for Africans', but rather to write accounts for Europeans to read 'about Africans'. Not surprisingly, this colonial intellectual tradition was rejected out of hand by many in Africa's diverse liberation movements. Nationalists, whether opposing colonial regimes from the bush or seeking to consolidate post-independence identities, needed to find unifying historical themes which encouraged national pride and to replace racist myths of colonialism — which asserted that Africa had no past worthy of being called 'history' — with a sense of the richness of Africa's vibrant past.

The interplay between nationalism and archaeology was particularly marked in West Africa. 'Negritude' writers, members of a literary movement that began among French-speaking African and Caribbean writers as a protest against French colonial rule, stressed the superiority of African culture, with its mystical connections with the past and with the land, over the corrupt materialism of Europe. A leading figure in the Negritude movement was the poet Léopold Senghor, elected first President of the Republic of Senegal in 1960. It was natural that Negritude's emphasis on the richness of the African past should lead to an interest in archaeology; this was most prominently expressed in the work of the Senegalese intellectual, Cheikh Anta Diop.

Diop argued that there had been a close relationship between black Africa and ancient Egypt. He stressed the achievements of Egyptian civilization, argued that the ancient Egyptians had been black and that the Nile Valley was the point of origin for African people ranging from the Fulani to the Zulu. Diop used archaeological evidence to trace migration routes, arguing for instance that the 'burial mounds' of the Inland Niger Delta were West African versions of the pyramids (Diop 1979; Holl 1990).

Many archaeologists have been unhappy about Diop's work. They point out that his synthesis of Africa's pre-colonial history depends on precisely the same reasoning as that used by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century white supremacists, who also argued

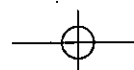


that everything good in the world originated in Egypt. But it is also true that such approaches have been effective in demolishing the tenets of colonial histories of Africa. Subsequent to the earlier interest of Negritude writers, a distinctive brand of archaeology has developed in post-colonial West Africa. This work has remained closely connected to issues of national consciousness and ethnic identity, and writing has stressed the continuities between the past and the present, often providing a 'charter' for the present day that is given authority by reference to the past (Hall 1996; Holl 1990). The significance of a 'grassroots consciousness' of the importance of the past, and the way in which excitement about the past could lay hidden beneath colonial rule, are well shown in Raymond Asombang's account of the museum assembled by Peter Shinwin Atanga at Akum, a few kilometres from Bamedia in Cameroon. A farmer and bookshop keeper, Atanga started a private museum collection in the late 1940s when his daughter asked him what men used to shave with before there were razor blades. This led him to realize that knowledge of the past was being rapidly lost, and such questions would not be answerable in the next century. He saw the purpose of his collection as 'teaching the past to posterity and providing material for research for Cameroonians, Africans and people of all races'. Atanga set up his collections in four rooms of his house: such was their value that they were seen as a potential nucleus for a National Museum of Cameroon in Yaounde (Asombang 1990).

Another example of the valency of archaeology after independence comes from Mozambique. Before 1975, there had been little widely-shared interest in Mozambique's pre-colonial past. Independence brought a major drive to establish a history for the new nation which outlined its origins deep in the past, rather than its servile status to a colonial power. This was linked with a particular emphasis on public education. In 1977, a new *Serviço Nacional de Museus e Antiguidades* was set up with education goals on a national scale and a Department of Archaeology was established at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane in Maputo. Apart from conducting research and teaching, staff concentrated on producing textbooks for schools and taught *agentes de cultura* at the secondary school level. Despite a protracted civil war, the number of known archaeological sites doubled in the first decade of independence.

One instance of this new public archaeology was at Manyikeni, an outlier of the Zimbabwe Culture located in Mozambique's south-central region. By 1978 some 400 local people had participated voluntarily in the fieldwork at the site, and in the following year a site museum was opened in an attempt to make an ongoing educational contribution to the local community. In the archaeologists' words,

the implementation of the project at Manyikeni in an area which was adversely influenced by the war situation symbolized for a wider audience in Mozambican society the people's determination both to comprehend and to affirm their historical role in the struggle for nationhood . . . it is this reservoir of public concern which must be tapped for the further development of the archaeological discipline in Mozambique. (Sinclair *et al.* 1993, 429)



Turning archaeology around in ways such as these has required the transformation of cultural institutions such as museums and universities. This has not been easy and, in many cases, is still an incomplete project. Raymond Asombang points out that, for many people, museums were inescapably part of the colonial legacy: 'There is no denying the fact that the museum in its current form and structure is an alien institution in Africa. It was introduced by the colonial master. Despite arguments to the contrary, it is generally believed that the intention was to collect and preserve the culture of the colonized peoples.' Nevertheless, others saw the possibilities for establishing a national identity and for awakening a 'national consciousness':

Many countries began to see the museum in a new light. It became an important cultural institution to support and project the newly won political independence. It was consequently fully embraced and developed towards this objective. It was at this time that the National Museum (*Musée National* in Francophone countries) was born (for example, in Nigeria, Kenya, Niger, Equatorial Guinea, Benin, etc.). (Asombang 1990, 189)

In its turn, acceptance that museums do have a post-colonial role introduces new tensions. Should national museums stress cultural unity, seeking to smooth over historical differences in the interests of a perception of the future? Or should they mirror cultural diversity, protecting minority traditions from being lost from memory? Writing about a project to establish a new National Museum in Cameroon's capital city, Yaounde, Asombang stresses the need to protect diversity:

How can the would-be National Museum of Cameroon enrich the country's cultural capital? To achieve this, it has first of all to be loved and visited by the community at large. The people should feel that the museum would be loved and visited by people of all social classes or ethnic and cultural groups, only if it reflects the cultural diversity of the country rather than a national culture where one cultural group dominates. Given our cultural background, any attempt to create a national culture runs the risk of leading to cultural integration of less dominant cultures. The National Museum which aims at projecting the idea of a national identity and national unity should portray the cultural multicentricism of the nation rather than dominant cultures. Though this may sound contradictory, it is nevertheless true that a National Museum which portrays a national culture whereby some cultures have lost their identity, will help to destroy rather than promote national unity. (Asombang 1990, 195-6)

Questions such as these have been raised in many other African countries in the later decades of the twentieth century.

Universities, too, have not necessarily been quick to revise their curricula in support of a distinctively anti-colonial approach to teaching archaeology. In Kenya, for instance, archaeology remained a junior partner to historical studies. Simiyu Wandibba remembers the way archaeology was taught at the University of Nairobi until the early 1970s.



'Prehistory of the World' formed a part of the History syllabus:

of all the 'history' courses, archaeology was the only one to which the students were introduced for the first time at university level. I personally had never heard the term archaeology before I joined the university. To make matters worse, the subject was full of tongue-twisting scientific words. This was especially true of the lectures on human evolution. Additionally, one came across many prehistoric sites that were not only difficult to pronounce, but also to spell, especially those in Hungary and China . . . The course tended to be a mere catalogue of prehistoric sites and cultures. Consequently, it turned out to be not only difficult, but also quite dull. There was very little that could excite the students . . . For the first seven years of the course's existence, only the present author, among the many hundreds of history students, was interested enough to indicate his desire to become an archaeologist, and actually went on to do so. (Wandibba 1990, 44-5)

Not surprisingly, given the place of the discipline in the university syllabus, archaeology had only a slight role in primary and secondary school teaching, despite the central role that archaeological research has played in the writing of Kenya's pre-colonial history.

Nwanna Nzewunwa writes in a similar vein of archaeology in Nigeria: The absence from the primary and secondary schools of programmes in archaeology has kept archaeology away from the grassroots of Nigerian cultural education. As a result, interest in archaeology is delayed until a much later stage when students enter university. This is too late. Since only a very small percentage of the population benefits from university education, the knowledge of archaeology is further restricted to a tiny group of Nigerians. It is, therefore, an inescapable conclusion that archaeology in Nigeria is exclusive and elitist. This is what archaeology should *not* be in Nigeria, nor indeed in any African setting, because of its place in local Nigerian history. Since Africans view history as a continuum made up of the past, no matter how remote, the present and the future, archaeology that enhances the recovery and interpretation of this history should have an elevated status, and should be shared by a larger sector of the Nigerian society. (Nzewunwa 1980, 40-1)

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The fortunes of post-independence archaeology, then, have been mixed. The racial assumptions and arrogance of a Gertrude Caton-Thompson or a Raymond Dart have been replaced by a vital appreciation of the importance of the past, whether to give substance to political movements or in the everyday appreciation of collections in a museum. But institutions have been slow to change and have been burdened with their colonial legacy. Those who have worked hard and passionately for a new appreciation of Africa's past have been hampered by the bitter colonial legacies of underdevelopment, economic dependency, the collapse of commodity prices and national indebtedness. There have, in consequence, often been no funds for museums and the development of a new public culture of an African past. As a consequence of factors



such as these, many African archaeologists have been forced into intellectual exile in Europe and North America in order to survive within their chosen profession.

Archaeology in South Africa faces its own problems, largely the consequence of its divergent history following the introduction of apartheid. Although South Africa has an internationally recognized tradition of archaeological research, its framing within an education structure organized by race and racial exclusion has resulted in an almost complete divide between the practice of archaeology and popular engagement with the past (Hall 1984, 1988, 1990). South Africa shares none of the national enthusiasm of Egypt, Nigeria or Zimbabwe for the archaeology of its past, comparatively few black students study archaeology in South African universities and there are very few professional archaeologists who are black. The contrast is evident in the responses to archaeology's heritage to the north and south of the Limpopo River. To the north, Great Zimbabwe is renowned both as national symbol and now as World Heritage Site. To the south Mapungubwe, the twelfth-century town that was precursor to Great Zimbabwe, stands isolated at the South African border, unknown even to local inhabitants.

### The contradiction of timeless time

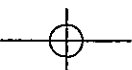
The years between the sunset of high colonial archaeology and the end of the millennium have, then, seen the emergence of an African archaeology practised by Africans for Africans. This distinctly African archaeology has been limited by endemic crises of resources for developing education and public institutions such as revitalized museums — problems that have been clearly identified and articulated, in particular, in the pages of the *African Archaeological Review* and other journals (see Musonda 1990; Karega-Munene 1996; Kusimba 1996; Andah *et al.* 1994). In the south, the persistence of institutionalized racism has inhibited the development of the broad consciousness of archaeology as history and identity that is a prerequisite for an enduring commitment to research (Shepherd 2000). But despite these limitations, some two hundred papers were delivered by archaeologists living and working in countries from all parts of Africa at the 1995 Pan African Association for Prehistory meeting in Harare (the first time there had been such representation since 1947 — Pwiti and Soper 1996). In 1999 the World Archaeological Congress met in Cape Town, again drawing participants from all parts of Africa (as well as the rest of the world) and hosting a variety of distinctly African symposia. Although, as Shepherd (2000) has pointed out in a comprehensive review of the Cape Town Congress, there is a chronic underdevelopment of indigenous archaeologies in Africa, extensive 're-colonization' of the continent by archaeologists from Europe and North America and 'a new and mercenary spirit in the handling of issues of heritage', there can be no doubt that, with the notable exception of South Africa, the second half of the twentieth century has seen the emergence of a distinctly continental tradition of research.



But still the contradiction persists. Despite the weight of evidence to the contrary, the popular image of Africa as the land that time forgot persists. Highbrow movies, such as Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky* (1990) cast Africa as an empty place, suitable for the redemption of the innermost self — a sort of psychological safari that seeks Jung's collective unconscious in the emptiness of the desert. For family entertainment Disney's *Lion King* offers an Africa in which the animals rule and people are altogether absent.

Contemporary popular Africa can be illustrated in two examples. Wilbur Smith can justifiably claim to be one of the kings of the airport novel — the world's best-selling fiction writer in 1981 with a string of subsequent successes to his name. His *Sunbird* (1972) continues the tradition of Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* a century after its publication (Hall 1995a). *Sunbird* is a political allegory that mourns the fading days of Rhodesia through images of the past. Ben Kazin, the hero archaeologist, believes that Carthaginians had a formative influence on Africa's past, although the academic world has yet to take him seriously. Kazin's friend and patron, the fabulously wealthy mining magnate and entrepreneur Louren Sturvesant, shows Kazin an aerial photograph, which reveals the outline of a lost city in the deserts of northern Botswana. Against the scepticism of the international academic community, the infidelity of Kazin's beautiful assistant Dr Sally Benator, and the terrorist activities of Kazin's one time linguistic specialist, Timothy Mageba, Kazin finds his site, to the acclaim of all. But this lost city carried a curse; a fungal infection that kills Sturvesant and takes Kazin into a prolonged dream of the past, in which the destruction of this earlier civilization is acted out. Through this experience, Kazin becomes the custodian of 'the legend of the ancients', 'a race of fair-skinned golden-haired warriors' who had come from across the sea and had 'mined the gold, enslaved the indigenous tribes, built walled cities and flourished for hundreds of years before vanishing almost without trace'. Their capital had been Opet, a far more substantial place than Great Zimbabwe (which was merely the garrison for the 'Middle Kingdom'). Like the Ophir of the Bible, this was a land of fabulous plenty, a hunter's paradise teeming with game, a repository of immense wealth. The economy was fuelled by Opet's extensive gold mines, and subject tribes from the rest of the sub-continent brought tribute.

All this was swept away by the dark disaster of the 'Bantu migration', an episode of 'diabolical fury', 'an almost superhuman destructive strength', 'a solid mass of black humanity'. Here, Wilbur Smith plies back and forth between his imagined history and his political present. The attack on Opet is led by Manatassi, King of the Vendi, while the attack on white Rhodesia is under the command of Major-General Timothy Mageba, of the People's Liberation Army. Kazin, the historian and archaeologist of Africa, sums up the connection for the reader: '... it came to me then that this man was not unique, Africa had bred many like him. The dark destroyers who had strewn her plains with the white bones of men, Chaka, Mzilikazi, Mamatee, Mutesa, and hundreds of others that history had forgotten. Timothy Mageba was only the latest in a long line of



warriors which stretched back beyond the shadowy, impenetrable veils of time' (Smith 1972, 231).

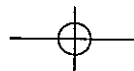
In Wilbur Smith's imagination, then, all 'civilization' in Africa is extra-territorial; all Africans can do is wipe away the gains brought from outside the continent through waves of barbaric rejection. This image appealed enormously to Rider Haggard and Joseph Conrad's readers in the nineteenth century, and equally to Wilbur Smith's innumerable readers a century later — the attraction of the plot lies in the way that it plays to well-entrenched stereotypes. It appeals equally to visitors to Sun International's 'Lost City', a high priced hotel and casino complex north of Johannesburg (Hall 1995a).

The Lost City is a sort of theme park. It is presented as a ruin, destroyed by an earthquake three thousand years ago, resulting in a maze of crumbled towers, heaps of stone and broken carvings (although, despite these ravages of time, there are restaurants, lounge bars, swimming pools and 300 guest rooms, equipped with bedspreads woven with animal spoor and zebra-stripped pencils by the telephones). The architecture of the Lost City is an eclectic *mélange* — a post-modern architectural dream complete with its own mythology, framed at the Californian corporate headquarters of Wimberly Allison Tong and Goo, international resort designers, and distributed as part of the resort's publicity pack. According to this 'Legend of the Lost City', a nomadic tribe long ago set out from northern Africa to seek a new place to settle. They found a secluded valley, gradually building a rich civilization. But one day their city was largely destroyed by an earthquake, which left only the Palace standing. Three thousand years later this lost valley was discovered by an explorer, who vowed to restore it to its original splendour. With the aid of futuristic technology, the past was brought back to life.

In the words of architect Gerald Allison,

the 'Legend of the Lost City' is based purely on fantasy, but colored by the heritage of Africa. As is consistent with the legend, we have tried to create a totally new architecture developed by a people completely isolated from any outside human influences. The architecture is the result of several centuries of such isolated development. The greatest influences were the weather, materials available, the skills of the craftsmen, and most importantly the flora and fauna of the region that existed during the time that the Palace was supposedly built. Some of the architectural forms were influenced by the legends and stories that the ancient ones passed on from generation to generation. These stories, both true and mythological, told of their forefather's life in northern Africa where great cities dominated by soaring, domed spires and high arched facades were common. As we developed this 'new architecture', we tried very hard to recall in a mystical manner a conglomeration of historical influences instead of a specific north African heritage. (in Hall 1995a)

But although Allison may believe his story to be original, his inspiration has an unnerving similarity with the age-old mythology of Africa as the empty continent, out of time. An early civilization, derived from the north, is destroyed by Africa's untamed forces:



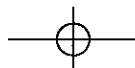
'One day, the winds screamed, the sky blackened and the jungle took on a dark and menacing look. The earth beneath the beautiful city began to shake with thunderous power. A mighty force destroyed walls and hurled buildings as if they were pebbles tossed from the hands of an angry giant' (from the 'Legend of the Lost City' — in Hall 1995a). With time, the enchanted ruins are discovered — Cecil Rhodes' Great Zimbabwe as the home of the Queen of Sheba, Wilbur Smith's Opet, and Sun International's casino and hotel complex, which continues to attract well-heeled tourists from both East and West, lured by their dream of Africa.

Some contradictions, however, can be resolved. How can it be that, whatever advances are made in the field of African archaeology in its contemporary, post-colonial modes of practice, the colonial assumptions of primitivism and timelessness continue to grasp the imagination of the West, whether this imagination is gratified in high-brow culture, popular entertainment or holiday destinations?

The key, I want to suggest, lies in archaeology's epistemology. Much has been written about post-processual archaeology, and there have been many responses to critiques of broadly post-modern readings of the past. These arguments are well known, and this is not the place to rehearse them. But what is striking is the way in which archaeology — both in Africa and other parts of the world — returns repeatedly to a comfort zone of sequences, artefacts, plant remains, faunal assemblages and other collections of objects. The 1995 Pan African meeting in Harare heard four papers on Hominid Evolution (including a presentation on one part of the human pelvis), five papers on Palaeoenvironmental Studies, twenty-nine papers on the Early, Middle and Late Stone Ages (mostly concerned with the typology of stone tools), three papers on rock art studies, twenty-one papers on aspects of early farming society, twenty-four papers on complex societies and twelve papers on Cultural Resource Management (Pwiti and Soper 1996). None of the presentations at the conference was concerned with the history of archaeological practice in Africa, or with the relationship between theory and practice. The 'scientific programme' for the meeting of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists in April 2000 identified three themes: 'Archaeology 2000', 'Archaeology in the Community' and 'Regionality in Archaeology'. But apart from one more contemplative session, the bulk of the paper titles were concerned with material from individual sites: 'The rock art of Bongani Game Reserve', a full session on forensic archaeology, 'Excavations at Blombos Cave', 'Burnt Bones from Swartkrans' ([www.wits.ac.za/archaeology/conference/program.htm](http://www.wits.ac.za/archaeology/conference/program.htm)).

There is no reason why the West's post-processual theories should become the paradigm for archaeology in Africa, or why African archaeology should not foster a strongly empirical tradition of research that serves to define its own intellectual identity. However, the tendency never to return to the materiality of evidence and its minutiae does have the particular consequence of stifling any tradition of reflective practice. It is as if the evidence continually 'speaks for itself', irrespective of the historical and

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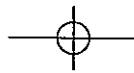
social contexts that influenced the formulation of research problems and structured the ways in which fieldwork was conducted and artefact collections assembled. The frustration that follows from the combination of alien theory and empiricism was well expressed by Francis Musonda a decade ago, in a review of archaeology in Africa which is still pertinent today:

Who expects me, for instance, to spend hours on end trying to digest the thoughts and ideas advanced in such publications as *Analytical Archaeology* . . . which offer no immediate solution to my country's problems? Do I need to engage in unraveling archaeological problems through application of theories that are of no immediate relevance to solving our pressing cultural, social and scientific difficulties? (Musonda 1990, 18)

This detachment of the 'archaeological present' from what Bourdieu would call *habitus* and field — 'generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices' (Bourdieu 1998, 8–9) — is particularly difficult for intellectual work in Africa because of the burden of colonial practices — the inevitable frames of racial distinction and colonialism that I have reviewed earlier in this paper. The wish to disregard archaeology's colonial origins in the name of a new start leaves popular discourse about Africa — the tradition of Conrad, Rider Haggard and a legion of contemporaries — unchallenged and likely to sneak back into the archaeological narrative.

Two examples illustrate the point. One of Africa's most important areas of archaeological work is the investigation of human origins, particularly in the East African rift valley. But such work depends on sponsorship and a play to popular perceptions of Africa. As Donna Haraway (1991) has shown, this in turn perpetuates classic stereotypes about Africa, timelessness, the jungle and apes: the Tarzan genre that inspired Johannesburg's *Lost City*. One of Africa's most important sites is Great Zimbabwe. But the application of structuralist theory — which sacrifices time for the sake of explanation — perpetuates the notion that Africa is in a permanent ethnographic present (Hall 1998).

Recognizing the inevitability of a connection between past and present interpretations of Africa illuminates in turn the reactions to Tom Phillips' Royal Academy exhibition. In *Africa — the Art of a Continent*, the curator was intent on demonstrating an 'African aesthetic' by allowing the objects to 'speak for themselves' (Phillips 1995). The catalogue — a massive 600 pages — presented its artefacts against bland and featureless backgrounds: white, dove-grey and black. Similarly, in the exhibition itself, the objects were displayed in darkened rooms, spot-lit: 'when you leave these galleries, gloomy beyond the call of conservation, the lingering feeling is that in 1995, as in 1895, Africa is the dark continent. . . .' (Hall, J. 1995). The essays in the catalogue, surveying the collections region-by-region, are by professional museum curators and art historians. In the gallery labelling was minimal and context understated; 'mystifyingly minimalist' (Hall, J. 1995). Overwhelmingly absent are the voices and lives of the people



who made and used these things. However, this device merely served to ensure that the exhibition was a mirror for the prior assumptions of its viewers. Rather than putting Africa back into history, the Royal Academy exhibition reinforced for many the belief that Africa was timeless. By leaving out anything that showed outside influence, this idea of a continent out of time was strengthened by the perception that such timelessness was situated in a space apart.

Not surprisingly, given the extreme form of its recent history, this contradiction is being played out in a particularly marked manner in the archaeology of South Africa at the close of the millennium. Because apartheid almost exclusively restricted the profession of archaeology to those South Africans who were classified as white, knowledge of the pre-colonial past through archaeological evidence was denied to almost all black South Africans. Denied a domestic field of support, or connections with the rest of the continent, archaeologists working in South Africa built, intentionally or by default, their strongest connections with the international community. Given the increasing pressure against engagement with South Africa from the early 1980s onwards, these foreign partnerships were dominated by those who were interested in archaeological science and generalizing theories and approaches such as structuralism and logical positivism that denied or downplayed the role of the politics of the present in the interpretation of the past. The niche for white South African archaeologists in the complex ecology of apartheid was of apolitical practitioners working for a higher goal (science) in a living laboratory with abundant possibilities. This was most strongly expressed in Botswana in 1984, when the Southern African Association of Archaeologists failed to pass a resolution condemning apartheid, causing Zimbabwean and Mozambican archaeologists to withdraw from the organization, and preparing the ground for the formal academic boycott of South African archaeology the following year, with the withdrawal of invitations to what would be the first meeting of the World Archaeological Congress in Southampton in 1986 (Shepherd 2000).

Now, at the end of the millennium, South African archaeology is paying a high price for this history, for the unavoidable consequences of apartheid, and for decisions such as that taken in Botswana in 1984. In the second democratic government, funding is tight. There are many competing priorities, of which education is one. But archaeology has little popular base. There is a call to study the past and to establish the history of the continent as the baseline for an 'African renaissance'. But, because the reality of archaeology has made so little impact in the experience of those in the new government (whether elected or appointed, or at the national or local level), this sense of the importance of the past does not translate into a priority for the discipline of archaeology. Many archaeologists in South Africa, for years opposed to the racial politics of apartheid, had expected 1994 to usher in their time. Instead, they have watched as funding for museums has diminished and as other priorities have dominated public debate about heritage.



### The third millennium

My argument has been that trends in the practice of archaeology in Africa over more than a century have shown that present practices carry with them the burdens of their pasts. Following from this, the key to resolving the contradiction of an Africa both in and out of time lies in reflective practice — a recognition of the relationship between past and present, and the use of a critical understanding of the past to inform practice in the future. This seems to me the only way to achieve both a genuinely post-colonial archaeology and also a broad-based support for the work that archaeologists do in public discourse, both within Africa and in the rest of the world.

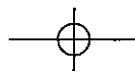
Logically, then, this becomes a key issue for the future: how can insight into the burden of the present help with anticipating, and to some extent directing, an archaeology of the future?

One key determinant of the course of archaeology in the twentieth century was the transition from colonial territory to nation state — the roll-out of independence from colonial and minority rule that began in the late 1950s and which reached its logical conclusion in 1994, with South Africa's first democratically-elected government. The creation of African nation states in mid-century formed an African archaeology responsive to issues of national history and identity, while the continuation of minority domination in the South has left South African archaeology cut off from a broad, popular base.

The political direction, and economic capacity, of the nation state will continue to be central to the framing of the public culture of which archaeology is a part. As in other continents, museums and universities are key nodal points in the ongoing development of research. Throughout Africa, such institutions remain critically dependent on government — local, regional or national, for financial support and viability. Consequently, the health of such institutions is critically linked to the ability of government to accumulate and direct resources for civic expenditure. More specifically, museums and universities are the repositories of key collections of material, reflecting archaeology's strange characteristic of transforming its evidence base as it explores it. Increasingly — as in the rest of the world — research on excavated collections will become as important as new fieldwork. As for fieldwork, this will be critically affected by the availability of infrastructure and conditions in which fieldwork is possible. At the time of writing, large parts of west-central and north-east Africa are sites of open conflict and warfare, rendering fieldwork difficult or impossible.

The crisis of the nation state in Africa is an aspect of global changes that, to a large extent, serve to define the new millennium. These changes have been drawn together by Manuel Castells:

A new world is taking shape at this end of millennium. It originated in the historical coincidence, around the late 1960s and mid-1970s, of three independent processes:

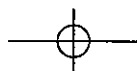


the information technology revolution; the economic crisis of both capitalism and statism, and their subsequent restructuring; and the blooming of cultural social movements, such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism. The interaction between these processes, and the reactions they triggered, brought into being a new dominant social structure, the network society; a new economy, the informational/global economy; and a new culture, the culture of real virtuality. The logic embedded in this economy, this society, and this culture underlies social action and institutions throughout an interdependent world. (Castells 1998, 336)

Castells' argument is nuanced. On the one hand, the effectivity of the nation state is declining as it loses its traditional controls and revenues — a widely recognized consequence of globalization. But, on the other hand, Castells concludes that the nation-state is far from dead. This is because a response to declining financial control is to assert more strongly the political claims of nationalism. What does this mean for public culture — and archaeology — in Africa? Fifty years after the formation of the first post-colonial nation states in Africa, the consequences of arbitrary borders, with their disrespect of earlier political structures, are far from worked through, and will become more contentious as the economic authority of Africa's mid-nineteenth-century nations decline. However much this results in Castells' inverse effect — the assertion of nationalism because of its declining saliency — it seems inherently improbable that nation states in Africa will be in a position to increase support for archaeology through museums and universities, or to spend more of the management and development of archaeological collections.

But while the ability of 'developing economies' to support public culture from public revenues seems set to decline, a second aspect of Castells' 'network society' is likely to increase in importance: local identity. The stress on locale is the answer to many to the dis-identification that follows from globalization. Whether manifested in nationalism or in new forms of ethnicity, the politics of local identity are a rising tide that is matching the trend to cosmopolitan, intercontinental communities (Appadurai 1996). Many local identity issues are populist and anti-intellectual. But many of them involve a mobilized awareness of history and an enthusiasm for its material manifestations — the artefacts that are the very stuff of archaeology (Hall 2000). Whether Hindu fundamentalism, ethnic mobilization in West Africa, Serbian identification with the monastic art of the medieval orthodox church or Celtic nationalism in Britain, the 'theatre of memory' (to use Raphael Samuel's phrase) is playing to packed houses (Samuel 1994).

The growing saliency of identity interests will cast an increasingly difficult role for archaeology. Very often, the attraction of historical — and archaeologically enhanced — identity lies in the projection of the past onto the future to mask the conditions of the present. Archaeologists will need to steer between, on the one hand, meeting a demand for information about the past — information which will probably be invented if it is not given — and, on the other hand, developing a critique of populist interpretations.

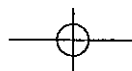


This is already placing archaeologists in difficult positions. For example, archaeology was used to legitimate the concept of a Greater Serbia that laid part of the intellectual foundations for atrocities in Bosnia and Kosovo and a visit to a museum in Croatia is vivid testimony to the way in which archaeological research is used to validate a Croat ethnic identity that is rooted deep in the past. Neo-nazi, millennial hate sites cite archaeological work (such as Colin Renfrew's overview of European prehistory) to claim Aryan superiority (Hall 2000). Some claims to a pre-colonial and 'pre-Bantu' identity in the southernmost parts of Africa claim a Khoikhoi culture that is 'in the blood'. Which archaeologist can contribute to an emerging popular culture that espouses the genetic transfer of culture, and is the archaeologist faced with this request not obliged to point out that this was the basis for the theory of racial domination that was apartheid?

For the archaeologist, then, as for practitioners of other historical and cultural disciplines, the development of populist local identity issues means that the practitioner must occupy the difficult space of the 'public intellectual', working to maintain Habermas' 'public sphere' as a place of critique and the application of logic and evidence (Habermas 1989). This will not be the comfortable, authoritative space of the academic expert — the museum scientist or university lecturer of a passing age whose opinion demands respect and silences opposition through intellectual authority. In the new knowledge economies of today and the future, everyone is potentially an 'organic intellectual', as Edward Said (1994) has observed. Rather than the laboratory or the podium, the archaeologist of the future will need to be familiar with the school, community hall and library. Rather than persuasion by authority, the archaeologist of the future will depend on persuasion by critique. Fieldwork and primary research will depend on engagement with local communities. There are good precedents for such practices in African archaeology: village archaeology in post-independence Mozambique, local community museums in West Africa. The latecomer is South African archaeology, fatally detached from a local community base, and with a lot of catching up to do.

This is not to say that such shifts will be easy. It is easier to idealize past paragons than it is to replicate them, and this will particularly be the case in the world that Castells maps out, in which it will be difficult or impossible to escape the forces of the market, and in which the distinction will become ever greater between those within the golden web of the information society and those who are in its new peripheral zones. The challenges to social justice that will follow in this 'postsocialist' age have been mapped out by Nancy Fraser, who argues for what she terms 'subaltern counterpublics' — 'arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics', and which thereby avoid the bracketing of cultural and economic differences which is the condition for a single, liberal, public sphere (Fraser 1997, 81). Whether in the community hall, classroom or cyberspace, tomorrow's public intellectuals will face huge challenges.

Intersecting with archaeology at this local level, but playing to a very different audience, is the global marketplace of cosmopolitan heritage. This trend is fuelled by key

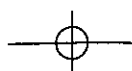


aspects of globalization: the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the voracious market for new experiences — world tourism and the intelligent traveller. Here, there is a direct connection with the long heritage of Africa as the exotic continent. Underpinned by UNESCO and other international agencies, there is a rapidly expanding market for heritage destinations, whether the medieval city of Fez, Great Zimbabwe or the rock art of southern Africa. This opens a second set of opportunities for archaeology in Africa — Cultural Resource Management. Whether funded by international agencies or by governments responding to the possibilities in their cultural heritage, archaeologists are increasingly finding opportunities in commercial or development-related projects. This trend brings with it a set of well known problems that include potential conflicts of interest and the difficulty of research beyond mitigation.

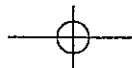
What are the common features of these future directions? Whether public intellectuals working with local communities, or cultural resource managers working for international agencies or commercial interests, archaeologists of the new millennium will need to be effective communicators and sensitive to the politics of their points of engagement. And here lies the hope of avoiding the contradictions of the past. There is little future prospect for the sort of practice that isolated archaeologists from their publics in the name of science, allowing the colonial myths of earlier centuries to become the media images of popular literature and media. Whether this brings the further marginalization and decline of Africa that is Manuel Castells' gloomy prediction or Thabo Mbeki's 'African Renaissance' is in the hands of those who will make the history of the future.

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field techniques and methods is changing our perception and knowledge of rural and urban life in the classical world, and even the classicist *Altertumswissenschaft* is now the subject of a fresh, more secular approach.

### MARTIN HALL

#### Timeless time: Africa and the world

This chapter explores ideas about Africa ~~as~~ a continent which has been an object of exploration since the earliest years of colonial settlement. Early ideas stressed the timeless nature of this continent 'without history'. Africa could be a place of darkness or a spur to romantic fantasy, but its people were depicted as frozen in an endless present. Such concepts shaped archaeology in the discipline's early years, and continue to have an influence today. Following independence in the mid twentieth century, many countries developed a distinctly African approach to reading the evidence of material culture (although the apartheid south continued to cling to European ideas about history). Very often, though, these historiographies have been starved through lack of resources. As we enter the third millennium, archaeology in Africa faces many challenges. The ways in which these challenges are addressed will determine the future of the discipline in this part of the world.

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### MARTIN CARVER

#### Marriages of true minds: archaeology with texts

Is archaeology-with-texts different from other kinds of archaeology? Since both are varieties of human expression, their analysis and interpretation have much in common, and the differences between text and material culture as media are less significant than the differences in expression found in each. The study of literate societies, in which both media are manifest, is especially rewarding due to the context that each gives the other. But examples of recent work (mainly from medieval Europe) suggest that there is no useful theoretical or methodological framework, or a unifying agenda, for a historical archaeology and there probably should not be. It seems more useful to risk being 'particularist' and 'relativist', and design each inquiry in terms of the kind of question being asked and the kinds of evidence available, using theories of interpretation liberally and eclectically. In the next millennium, multi-disciplinary study-groups should also become more flexible and less institutional, adapting the modular system to research as well as teaching. As to our output, it should develop interactive electronics for the airing and sharing of data and theory, reserving publication for imaginative, graphical and poetical versions of the past.