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1. Cultural transmissions and transformations

Joanne Clarke

Introduction

The idea for this volume originated in Jerusalem five years ago while I was working for the Council for British Research in the Levant. In March 2000 Jerusalem was relatively peaceful. The present intafada was eighteen months away and although tensions simmered under the surface the outbreak of hostilities remained unpredicted by political analysts. The Oslo Peace Accords had facilitated a brief flowering of interaction between Palestinians and Israelis. The West Bank was open and travel to and from Israel was time-consuming but straightforward. Palestinians were relatively free to work in Israel and Israelis too travelled to the larger Palestinian towns often spending evenings in Ramalla and Bethlehem drinking Arabic coffee in western style cafés. For non-nationals freedom of movement was even greater and day trips to Gaza were both possible and pleasurable. At this time I was jointly directing excavations at the Bronze Age site of al-Moghraqa, five miles south of Gaza, and this guaranteed that I travelled between Israel and Gaza on a regular basis interspersed with longer field seasons during much of the summer months. Outside of the archaeological community co-operation between Palestinians and Israelis was common if not particularly advertised. Institutions like the World Bank and UNESCO were funding Palestinian initiatives (often with significant Israeli help and input) in most areas of business, government, health, environment and heritage. The outlook was promising.

In this climate of relative calm and optimism the idea for a conference in Jerusalem that dealt with the transmission and transformation of culture seemed highly appropriate. The city of Jerusalem, probably more than any other in the world, embodies everything good and bad about cultural diversity. There is tolerance and interaction between religions but also racial and religious prejudice and persecution. More importantly, this pattern has remained unchanged for thousands of years. People in Jerusalem have transmitted and appropriated, assimilated, transformed and rejected cultural traits from different cultural groups over millennia.

The conference was originally entitled *The Transmission and Assimilation of Culture*. In hindsight this title was misleading as the word assimilation somewhat clouded the underlying themes of the conference. These were to examine, in archaeological terms, how aspects of culture are transmitted from one group of people to another, the impetuses that lead one group to actively seek out cultural aspects of another, and how cultural traits are transformed once they leave their place of origin. The focus was on the role of human agency in the movement of cultural traits and the word assimilation was altogether too passive to reflect this focus. Since then the title has been simplified to just *Archaeological Perspectives on the Transmission and Transformation of Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean*. This new title adequately reflects the themes of the conference and the contents of this volume.

That was five years ago and it seems fitting now to reflect upon the changes in circumstances that have occurred since the conference took place. Aside from the very depressing state of affairs in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, issues of cultural transmission and transformation are more relevant now than they have ever been.

Cultural transmission and transformation in a personal context

As a lecturer in material culture studies with a background in archaeology I teach in what is first and foremost an art history department. I share with my colleagues an interest in culture in general and material and visual culture in particular but our methodologies and theoretical positions are diverse. Within our department we teach the concepts, theory and methodology that underpin the study of material and visual culture. However, we come at the same topics from three vastly different positions. If I were to try to characterise all three in three short sentences I would say that my art history colleagues concern themselves primarily with the way in which art impacts upon culture over time and how culture in turn transforms art. My anthropology colleagues concern themselves with all

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manifestations of culture in the present, whether material or non-material, and their social meaning. Archaeologists like myself are restricted by the limits of the discipline to the study of materials and the patterns they form in the archaeological record which help us to speculate about the "full range of human experience" (Renfrew and Bahn 2000, 17) as practised in the past. What brings us together is a desire to understand how material and visual culture changes our perceptions and how we in turn change the material world around us to suit our personal and collective preferences.

Oddly, there are similarities between my experiences in Jerusalem and my experiences in an English university that impinge significantly upon this volume and the way it has been shaped. In Jerusalem I was surrounded by cultural diversity. There is a real sense that what exists around you is the material and immaterial manifestations of many cultures and that those cultural traits have been transmitted and transformed over millennia. The city is an eclectic mix of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim historical, racial and religious traditions overlain by modern Israeli and Arab personal and political trends. There is a blend of the religious and the secular, where buildings once constructed as religious monuments in which more than one religion has been practised, are now market places or schools or the houses of the rich.

Personal styles reflect the same mixing of religious and secular, traditional and new. Orthodox Christians, Jews and Arabs, bedecked in the dress of their religions, walk side by side with more secular jeans and T-shirt-wearing members of society. Older Palestinian and Jewish men can be seen in the trappings of their culture while their children wear the latest western fashions, in some instances underneath more traditional dress. Language is perhaps the greatest oddity of all. Israelis will say in informal circles that Hebrew is their second language. In some instances this is true. Israelis can be more fluent in a language other than Hebrew, particularly if they have migrated to Israel. In order to be understood they may use English as the language of communication. In other instances Arabic may be the language of communication. It is, of course, the first language of Palestinians, but it is also the first language of Israeli Arabs, Yemeni Jews, Moroccan Jews and other immigrant populations.

There is a sense that cultural mixing is so pervasive that it has spawned an unconscious inclination to accentuate current collective identities. Palestinians are Palestinians first and foremost, although the religious and racial constituents that make them Palestinians are diverse. The basis of their being Palestinian is primarily political and is represented by their relationship to, and their longevity in the landscape (Abu-Lughod, Heacock and Nashef 1999). Israelis on the other hand have a collective identity based first and foremost upon religion, even though racial diversity is considerable. Again, the sense of relationship and connection with the landscape has primacy but is based upon a religious history rather than a continuous presence (Silberman 1990, 1991; Whitelam 1996). Notions of being Israeli or Palestinian are relatively modern constructions and do not reflect identities that may have existed in the past. However, the reinforcement of history and long surviving cultural traits often form the basis for these identities. Collective identities are adaptive, scalar and culturally constituted over time. Palestinians for example can be Muslims or Christian Arabs, Israeli Arabs, Gazans or Halilis. Israelis can be Hesidic or Falashas Jews, Russians or Yemenis. What is more, the excesses of cultural diversity can lead to new alliances, new sets of values and new sets of beliefs. Amongst social groups the formation of alliances, and the collective identities that constitute them, take on substance when a commonality of cultural traits is identified and exploited (Rutherford 1990, 19). In instances where diversity and inter-mixing of cultural traits are pronounced the consequence can be a greater sense of group identity, minimising social risk, whether real or perceived (Cohen 1987, 11–19; Cohen 2000; Woodward 1997, 30–31).

At the other end of the scale collective identities also exist amongst much smaller groups, but where diversity and inter-mixing of cultural traits are less pronounced there is less need to emphasise differences and a greater desire for cultural interaction. In the School of World Art Studies where staff members come from a variety of learning backgrounds and represent a number of different academic disciplines one might expect to observe the same tendency to form alliances along academic lines. Although the boundaries that demarcate groups are more fluid, alliances, and the collective identities that constitute them, can still be created for professional survival. Moreover, this diversity of knowledge and experience can create both a climate of sharing and an undercurrent of tension as individuals and groups try to negotiate their academic and professional space. My training as an archaeologist, for instance, is in some respects fundamental to who I am and amongst other archaeologists I feel a unity and common identity based on shared experience that I do not feel amongst art historians and anthropologists. Our different backgrounds, ways of teaching, different methodologies and theoretical positions do not instil in me the same sense of unity. What is so inspiring however is that this sense of difference creates positive personal and professional interactions rather than negative ones. The tendency to form alliances is outweighed by the desire to impart knowledge. Knowledge, as a form of culture, is actively transmitted and transformed through a dynamic, constantly evolving process of social interaction. The result has the effect of strengthening the collective identity of all.

For these reasons more than any other I feel that this volume comes from an empathy with and an understanding of how cultural traits are transmitted and transformed in time and space. Ultimately this volume is about similarity and difference but its focus is very much on how people negotiate aspects of similarity and difference and how

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these are materialised in the archaeological record. The volume is arranged into three parts which deal with these issues. The first examines some of the methods archaeologists employ to examine complex questions, such as how and why culture is transmitted and transformed. Culture is not always represented materially in the archaeological record and when it is it can mislead rather than lead us toward understanding the past. We try to get around this problem by employing techniques of analysis that will lessen the risk of our misunderstanding the evidence. The seven papers in part one illustrate some of the methods archaeologists might use to explore materially the concepts of cultural transmission and transformation. Part two examines the ways in which culture is transformed through time, a phenomenon that has links with the study of cultural evolution. In this volume however, the focus is very much on how human beings actively contribute to cultural change in preference to passive change, such as random error or cultural selection. Finally, part three explores the ways in which cultural traits are transmitted and transformed in space. In the fifties variation in the material record was thought to represent migrations, invasions and diffusions. In the sixties variation represented environmentally and ecologically determined changes in behaviour and in the eighties variation represented human agency. Now in the 21st century we are comfortable with a combination of all three but the focus has shifted from a concern with variation itself, to what variation represents. The concepts that form the basis of part two and part three are not, however, mutually exclusive but as I mention in my introduction to part two, time often engenders a resistance to change, whereas the movement of materials and ideas through space appears to enhance or promote change. Again, in this volume the focus is very much on human agency.

One of the greatest problems of archaeology is how to 'see' cultural transmissions and transformations in the archaeological record particularly when most of culture is intangible, such as identity, ideology and cosmology. One approach taken in this volume is to examine long-term changes in material culture traits that might reflect intangible aspects of culture, for example, the study of personal and group space, figurative art and elite objects.

Culture and material culture, what relationship?

The Oxford dictionary defines culture as the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge that constitute the shared bases of social action. Material culture might then be thought of as the output of the activity of culture, the part that is formed when human beings interact and engage with their material world. Without a material world in which to carry out the activity of 'culture forming' human beings would not create material culture – it would be impossible. So the material world and material culture are inexorably linked.

As a result of changes in the approach of anthropologists and archaeologists to culture theory the static quality of material culture has been replaced by a new dynamism. Culture has come to be viewed not as something you have, but as something that is continuously created (Chilton 1999, 1). Even so, material culture is often thought of as a subset of culture, which I believe, simplifies what is, in fact, a much more complex relationship.

Culture is created by experience, and everything that is experienced by human beings comes through interactions with the world around us. The creation of culture, therefore, takes place within our material world and is the product of our experiences. Culture exists because human beings strive to understand and make sense of these experiences and then pass on the knowledge of these experiences to others. Culture cannot exist outside of or beyond materiality. There is a distinction, of course, between materiality and material culture, but any small alteration or adaptation that human beings make to their material world is a cultural phenomenon and therefore may be defined as material culture. Material culture is therefore much more than just a subset of culture or a component of a cultural system – it is the fabric of everything cultural.

The study of material culture theory has far greater importance than is usually credited to it by anthropologists as it is inherently tied into the study of culture in general. If we return to the purpose of this volume, to discuss and examine in archaeological terms how aspects of culture are transmitted and transformed, we could take the position that material remains are the incomplete reflection of cultural processes that happened in the past. But if the creation of culture and of material culture is a parallel phenomenon arising from continuous experience of the material world then material remains of a society are the surviving remnants of all culture whether material or non-material. This concept has rather interesting implications for those of us who have tended to use material culture simply to interpret the past. The relationship between material culture and culture in general is no longer a binary one with material culture reflecting behaviour, which in turn is changed by material culture. It becomes something far more fundamental. Material culture must be thought of as constituting not only everything that makes us human but also everything that makes up our past, present and future, for it is through the materiality of our world that we experience, learn and create.

Let me explain by example. Watkins (this volume) and Mithen (1996, 159; 1999) agree that the ability for human beings to conceive of a symbolic world was the product of a so-called 'cognitive' shift, the mind finally gaining 'cognitive fluidity'. Although they disagree as to when this event took place they both assume it was the result of changes in the way human beings perceived things. This thesis presumes that cognition, or the mental act by which knowledge is acquired is the thing that

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changes, albeit through external influences. An alternative thesis based upon the concept that culture is created through experience of the material world, would be that the ancient mind does not undergo any particular cognitive shift. Rather, experience of the material world changes in such a way that communication of experience requires greater abstraction of thought. For example, the actions involved in the hunting of bison are much simpler to conceive of than the planting of a crop (Boyd, this volume). It does not require the mind to do more than perceive of a series of actions and their possible outcomes. The experience of hunting bison can be easily communicated because it is a simple cause and effect event. But what happens when experience of the material world becomes significantly more complex? Planting a seed in the ground requires that the mind not only conceives of the actions and outcomes but also conceives of the material world in abstractions. These abstract experiences will then be communicated to others. The process of communicating the experience of planting a seed and that seed becoming barley that can be eaten is the process of communicating abstract ideas, a much more complex form of communication that requires symbolic representation.

Material culture theory and archaeology

Archaeology is limited by its reliance on an incomplete material record. This is not to say that archaeologists are unable to interpret the material record in terms of cultural behaviour but they are ultimately hostages to the quality of the data. It is easy for readers to forget that those who write papers dealing with the emergence of humanity for example (Watkins, this volume) or Cyprus and Cypriot identity under British rule (Seretis, this volume) formulate their theories and arguments upon rigorous and careful observation of material-culture patterning. No matter what definitions we apply to archaeology it is important to remind ourselves that it is the study of material culture, and cultural meaning is, by extension, only accessible through the careful examination, collection, recording, analyses and interpretation of data. Archaeologists have no sense of culture, nor can they trace or record cultural transmissions or transformations if they are not represented materially. Every contributor to this volume has used material culture patterning to construct their argument, whether or not those arguments concern a material manifestation of culture or an ideological, social or religious manifestation of culture.

Anthropologists can record changes in non-material cultural phenomena because they are able to talk with the individuals concerned. They can also form hypotheses that explain why certain relationships exist. Sokefeld (1999) for example, has undertaken a study of the inhabitants of Gilgit, a town in the northern area of Pakistan, where complex dimensions of identity difference are based upon clan, kinship and religion. These complex relationships undergo quite significant transformations through various social interactions with neighbouring villages. Such cultural transmissions and transformations are invisible to archaeologists because they are not represented materially.

Amongst anthropologists material culture studies has had a rather poor reputation as a topic of research. It does seem odd therefore that anthropology appears to have had the authoritative word on material culture theory when anthropologists themselves readily admit that the study of material culture took a back seat for many years to other forms of cultural studies. Miller (1998, 3) suggests that one reason why material culture was avoided as the primary focus of academic debate (amongst anthropologists) was that it invited the accusation of fetishism. In his words "...the ideals of social analysis would be usurped by the means of artefact analysis and that this would prevent rather than enhance the study of cultural life" (Miller 1998, 3). Archaeologists have little choice. How can it be a case of fetishism when we have nothing else but the material culture record? In fact it is the rigour behind the study of material culture in archaeological enquiry that makes it academically very robust.

In the last twenty years material culture theory has experienced a slow resurgence in anthropological circles, and there is now a plethora of publications dealing with the topic (Appadurai 1986; Baudrillard 1988; Buchli 2002; Dant 1999; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Harris 1979; Hodder 1987, 1989; Jarman 1997; Miller 1987, 1998; Thomas 1991). Archaeologists have also contributed to this new interest (Chilton 1999; Dobres and Hoffman 1999; Hodder and Hutson 2003; LaMotta and Schiffer 2001; Shennan 2002; Stark 1998; Tilley 1991) to name only a few. Perhaps the most significant advance for archaeology is that new (reflexive) methodological approaches to the study of material culture have allowed greater profundity in the interpretative process. "The emphasis is on the social and technical context in which materials are produced and the interpretation of materials by researchers in the present" (Chilton 1999, 1). Material data, therefore, have become more than just the objects: they are the raw materials, technology, tools and techniques as well as the finished products. The papers in this volume all reflect this new approach. The focus is on processes in context rather than objects in context and what these processes can tell us about the way in which human beings negotiated their cultural relations in the past and what sorts of interactions and changes were taking place.

The importance of context in interpretation

Archaeologists have returned to the importance of context relatively recently, with a burgeoning interest in reflexive interpretation (Hodder 1999, 2000) borrowed from anthropology (Bowman 1997; Clifford 1986, 1988) and carefully applied to archaeological fieldwork. Hodder, for example, continually updates and adapts his interpretations of the material record as contextual data

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changes and as different experts input their observations into the interpretative process (Hodder 2000). In this way it has been argued that archaeologists are able to interpret meaning in material culture data by understanding "the routinised practices occurring within the same contextual spaces and which will reflect their past interpretations and embodied experience" (Last 1998, 355).

What is difficult to understand is that context was for some time secondary to such things as analogy. We all now think of contextualising our interpretations as fundamental to the study of archaeology but it wasn't always so. In the 1960s and 1970s the importance of ethnoarchaeology and ethnology was such that prehistorians spent much of their time looking for comparative data in modern hunter/gatherer societies. The return to context driven interpretation was accompanied by a switch in focus, away from things, toward people.

The importance of context has been highlighted in many of the papers in this volume, particularly those that examine intra-mural deposition patterns (Antoniadou), discard patterns (Boyd; Frankel; Goring-Morris; Webb) or house biographies (Papaconstantinou; Thomas). Even accounting for the limitations of published material, papers such as Antoniadou's and Papaconstantinou's have successfully applied new methods of contextual analysis to arrive at fuller interpretations of the material record.

One point I would like to mention briefly is the geographical and chronological scope of this volume. A quick peruse of the papers by the reader will demonstrate that topics range from the distant prehistoric to the near-present day, from Crete to Cyprus to the southern Levant but there is a particular weighting toward topics related to Cyprus. I had not reflected on this skewing until it was brought to my attention by the reviewer. I returned to Iacovou's paper, which discusses some of the many periods during which Cypriot culture has been influenced and changed by foreign interaction, and on reflection I find it apt that the topical range of the volume not only reflects our current archaeological interest in particular regions or themes but also an academic and historical reality. For many years archaeologists working on Cyprus have concerned themselves with the causes and effects of cultural interaction and integration. Historically, Cyprus was at the centre of trading networks in the Bronze and Iron Ages with Egyptians, Minoans, Mycenaeans, Phoenicians and Philistines, to name a few. Cyprus had been colonised, some say repeatedly, and has been acculturated by, and in turn enculturated, a wide array of different cultural traits and cultural groups. It is not surprising then that archaeologists working on Cyprus have a lot to say about the transmission and transformation of culture. This might be because Cyprus is an island bounded by the sea and it is often presumed that it is easier to observe the causes and effects of cultural interactions on a culturally and geographically remote place. Lately though there has been much debate about how 'islandlike' islands really are. For example, Rainbird (1999) and Gosden and Pavlides (1994) would argue that islands can exist in many different geographical, cultural and ecological settings and that it is a modern construction that leads us to view sea-bounded islands as somehow special. I think that this is particularly important for the eastern Mediterranean, which actually exhibits incredible diversity and also some interesting periods of cultural retardation and insularity. However, because the Levant littoral is not an 'island' no one has ever examined degrees of cultural interaction or insularity in any systematic way. It has always just been assumed that Cyprus as an island had periods of cultural insularity often punctuated with periods of greater interaction. Overall I think the volume aptly reflects the geographical focus on cultural transmission and transformation in the eastern Mediterranean. Without doubt similar issues and debates have been conducted farther a field in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and inland Syria for example, but these are beyond the remit of this volume. Having said this, cultural relationships that existed between some of these areas and the eastern Mediterranean should not be ignored in the long term and there is scope for further studies of this nature.

All of the papers in this volume are concerned with how cultural transmissions and transformations can be studied through the archaeological record. In some papers the focus is on material culture change, in others the focus is on material manifestations of other sorts of culture change, such as transformations in religion, ethnicity and ideology. The binding force in all is the desire to read the archaeological record in new and exciting ways, and ways that give us a glimpse of the dynamics of human relationships.

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