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Between facts and fiction: Reflections on the archaeologist's craft¹

The topic of this contribution ventures into a field that has drawn much attention in the last forty years. Since the early 1960s, we have witnessed the creation and, sometimes, the subsequent decline of a number of different sorts of 'theoretical' archaeology. This generated an unprecedented evolution of methodological consciousness in archaeology. Today, however, is not the appropriate occasion to take stock and try to sift the chaff from the wheat. Neither is it the right moment to reopen old battles. Instead, as the title of my paper indicates, I have chosen to concentrate on some rather general aspects of our discipline.

The makeup of archaeology

If we try to visualize the history of prehistoric archaeology since its very beginnings in the first half of the nineteenth century, we are faced with a remarkably steady development. This is true not only for the material record of the past which came to light in ever increasing quantity and quality. It is equally true for the emergence of a body of concepts, methods and techniques to be applied to the factual evidence unearthed. For example, from the very beginning time control was steadily improved by means of stratigraphy on the one hand and the principle of artifact association on the other.

By the end of the nineteenth century, prehistoric archaeology had accumulated such an impressive body of material evidence that its role in tracing the course of human history could no longer be ignored. This was helped by an intellectual climate in which the idea of national states was at the very center of political and historical thinking. Archaeology with its unprecedented discoveries seemed to embody the potential of prolonging national history far beyond the temporal confines of written documents. Lastly and most importantly, prehistoric archaeology had struggled hard to come up with a method that was at the same time specific to archaeology as well as integrated

¹ Due to temporal problems, I had to cancel my participation in the Poznan Conference on very short notice. Therefore, I should like to thank the organizers for having agreed to include my intended presentation in the published proceedings. The main body of the following text has served already as an introductory address to the 7th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists at Esslingen on 19 September 2001. I should like to acknowledge that the title of this paper was inspired both by the title of the German translation of R. J. Evans' *In Defence of History* (1997) and that of the English translation of Marc Bloch's *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien* (1974).

into the larger context of contemporary learned thinking. Surely, Montelius' typology incorporated all the requirements needed. Moreover, its apparent evolutionary foundation fitted very well with the discipline's capacity of literally bringing to light the material facts of mankind's physical, cultural and social evolution.

Taken all together, prehistoric archaeology had finally reached a degree of maturity that it was no longer possible to refuse it a place in university curricula. Thus, we may agree with Bruce Trigger that the nineteenth century saw the "beginnings of scientific archaeology" (Trigger 1989, 73-109). We must not forget, however, that there was that other important element as well: a national impetus deeply rooted in historicism and therefore constituting the very opposite of a scientific approach to the past.

I am mentioning all this as a reminder that from early on prehistoric archaeology was impregnated with two opposing modes of thought: one humanist, residing within the realm of the liberal arts, and the other firmly based within the sciences. This dichotomy, which in fact qualifies as an epistemological dichotomy, was to stay with archaeology to this very day. Over the years, each mode came to the fore and exerted its influence in an irregular pattern. Looking back, one realizes that this varying preponderance of the humanist and the scientific orientation has been largely ignored for more than half a century.

Even Marxism in its non-orthodox variety does not seem to have had any considerable influence on archaeological methodology. If we take V. Gordon Childe – a self-proclaimed Marxist – as witness, it will prove very difficult to distinguish his methodological position from that of his non-Marxist colleagues (on Childe see, e. g., McNairn 1980; Trigger 1980; 1989, 254-263; Harris 1994). Certainly, in the 1930s he became very much interested in cultural evolution and advocated and applied a materialist approach to prehistory. His *Piecing together the Past* (1956), however, represents a very conventional, 'mainstream' outline of some central issues of *The Interpretation of Archaeological Data* as the subtitle reads. On the other hand, this book stood out from the bulk of archaeological publications of the time by the mere fact that in those years there were not very many archaeologists capable and willing to devote their energy to methodological issues at all. Fundamental contributions like Walter Taylor's *A Study of Archeology* (1948) were much too rare to significantly affect the general prevalence of a certain intellectual barrenness within the discipline.

The great awakening

To sum up, it seems rather obvious that up to the late 1950s, prehistoric archaeology had remained largely self-contained and showed little or no interest at all in rethinking its position within the academic universe. This was to change dramatically with the onset of the *New* or *Processual Archaeology* in the 1960s which, in turn, was challenged in the early 1980s by what Ian Hodder labeled *Postprocessual Archaeology* (Hodder 1985).

It is quite evident that the driving forces behind the request for theoretical reflection and methodological advancement within the discipline were, and still are, chiefly to be found in North American and British university departments. Since the early days of

the New Archaeology it was equally apparent that the "great awakening", to use Colin Renfrew's succinct expression (Renfrew 1982, 7), caught on very differently in continental Europe. It is very interesting indeed that a fair number of archaeologists in comparatively small nation-states like the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands almost immediately took up what was heralded as a "revolution in archaeology" (Martin 1971). By contrast, however, the reaction in West Germany as well as, of course, in communist East Germany and all other states behind the Iron Curtain, was extraordinarily reserved, to say the least².

As far as Germany is concerned, it is only in the last decade or so that the general climate in archaeology is beginning to change due to a more open and critical generation of students and young professionals. Nowadays there are vivid discussions of issues ranging from the structure of university curricula to the methodological foundations of archaeology and the discipline's relevance for the general public. Although still restricted to a minority within the discipline, this nevertheless represents a remarkable progress in comparison to the intellectual climate in the first four decades after World War II.

Archaeology and historiography

However, my aim here is not to dwell on the intellectual climate in German prehistoric archaeology past and present nor on that in other countries. Rather, I should like to deal with the fundamental issues alluded to in the title of my paper: Does archaeology really operate between fact and fiction? How fictitious is archaeology? What is archaeological fact, what is fiction? Is there an archaeological 'truth' to be discovered? What do we mean when we talk of 'past reality'? Is there a past reality apart from the present? And if so, how is it mirrored in the archaeological record? What part of past reality are archaeological sources capable of reflecting and in what manner? What is our notion of 'reenaction' or 'reconstruction' of a past long dead?

I think most would agree that these questions are neither trivial nor exceedingly far-fetched. In fact, their subject matter is very much part of the postprocessual agenda and rhetoric. These and similar questions thus indicate the battleground of the two most influential archaeological movements which ever existed. Consequently, they need to be addressed. Unfortunately, this can only be done here in a most abbreviated manner.

Generally, I find it amazing that prehistoric archaeology has only very rarely been considered within the wider field of the historical disciplines. For most of us, archae-

² It is certainly misleading to link this attitude in West German archaeology, as U. Sommer (2000, 161) does, to a rather critical review of the New Archaeology published in German in one of the leading German journals (Eggert 1978). In fact, this review was largely ignored by the German archaeological 'establishment' of the late 1970s. Moreover, it is telling that about nothing or very little of the pertinent Anglo-American archaeological publications of the 'new' bent had been met with interest in West German archaeology in the fifteen years prior to this review.

ology deals with that part of man's history where literacy was absent or very rare. This notion given, it is hard to understand why the methodological debates in historiography should be of no interest to us. Therefore and by contrast to common practice, I think it indispensable that archaeologists direct their attention toward history. What we consider fundamental issues of our discipline are in fact transcending its boundaries. They are part of a much larger historical context and thus cannot be solved by ignoring what has been debated in historiography for more than 150 years. This is not to say, however, that history is equivalent to a self-sufficient island in the academic ocean waiting to receive those who are ship-wrecked or otherwise endangered. Quite the contrary is true, as we shall see in a moment.

History has always been considered by the majority of its practitioners as belonging to, and being firmly established in, the humanities. Shortly after it became an independent academic discipline in the first half of the nineteenth century, however, this view was disputed: there were some who preferred history to be modelled after the natural sciences. In fact, the method of systematic source-criticism, developed by classical philologists and then transferred into historiography (e. g. Muhlack 1988), was considered akin to scientific procedures at the time. This method drastically changed the attitude toward historical texts in that it enabled historians to differentiate between 'primary' and 'secondary sources' (Evans 1997, 18-20). In addition, the philosophical doctrine of positivism with its stress on empirical facts and the attendant extraordinary development of the sciences exerted an almost irresistible influence on the liberal arts as well.

Suffice it to say that this antagonism of *Geistes-* and *Naturwissenschaften*, to use Wilhelm Dilthey's terms, has marked the theoretical debate in history until today (Evans 1997, 45 ff). This might be exemplified by pointing to the opposite epistemological procedures advocated by the historicist and scientific camp of historiography. While the first employ a hermeneutic approach, those of scientific observance are basing their search for historical knowledge on the covering-law model or hypothetico-deductive approach of Analytical Philosophy (Goertz 1995, esp. 105-129; on the latter see, e. g., Hempel 1942; Dray 1957; 1966; Danto 1968). Obviously, this echoes the idiographic versus nomothetic debate in philosophy at about the turn of the twentieth century. It is indeed there where the roots of these contrasting views of history are to be found.

Since the search for laws of culture or, for that matter, laws of history, has not come up with convincing results as yet, support for the analytical model of historical explanation is, to put it mildly, certainly not growing³. Basically, history is thus left with

3 The current situation in this regard has been very convincingly outlined by A. C. Danto in his reflections on "The Decline and Fall of the Analytical Philosophy of History" (Danto 1995), to the rise of which he once had added quite a lot (Danto 1968). His conclusion, *inter alia*, reads as follows: "Hempel's theory [of historical explanation of 1942] in fact strikes me still as true. It just stopped being relevant, the way the whole philosophy of history it defined stopped being. It was replaced with a different set of questions, a world in effect, into which it no longer fit. ... What I can say is that since points of view are historically indexed, since, that is, the worlds of historical beings are penetrated by their historical locations, the *new* philosophy of history is in effect a new understanding of ourselves as through and through historical" (Danto 1995, 85).

hermeneutics. This specific interpretive procedure was originally devised by Friedrich Schleiermacher as *Kunstlehre des Verstehens*, i. e., as the art of interpretation of written sources. While it is deeply rooted in history and the humanities in general, its methodological status has been debated ever since (Goertz 1995, 105-117).

However, much more interesting for our topic is the fact that the historical and, consequently, philosophical dispute about the adequate epistemological procedure to be followed is being reiterated in archaeology: postprocessual archaeologists had been trying very hard to roll back processual archaeology's allegedly scientific turn by advocating hermeneutics and a historicist approach to pre- and protohistory (e. g. Hodder 1991; for a critical assessment Porr 1998). The current debate is all the more involved due to what is called the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities (e. g. Goertz 2001). Unfortunately, lack of space renders a discussion of the reflection of postmodernist theory in archaeology impossible. Thus, the notion of "material culture as text" must remain unaddressed. Instead, the following will concentrate on some elaboration of my main subject, i. e., archaeology between fact and fiction.

Remarks on facts

At first glance, the question of what an archaeological fact is may appear trivial. Most of us will probably agree that an archaeological fact is what has materially remained of past behavior. When we confront this with the notion of 'historical fact' as advocated recently by the British historian Richard Evans, we realize a slight difference. Evans says: "A historical fact is something that happened in history and can be verified as such through the traces history has left behind" (Evans 1997, 76). Evidently, the archaeological equivalent for this would be a prehistorical or protohistorical fact. In contrast to this, however, the trace left behind of what happened in the past is usually called an archaeological fact.

Probably most archaeologists also would agree that archaeological facts pose no problem as long as we talk about artifacts in the common sense of man-made objects that survived from the past and are its material witnesses. Archaeological features, however, are quite another matter. Take, for example, the delineation of minute details of a complicated stratification: this is a category of fact already more difficult to agree upon, as anybody with field experience will admit. Even more difficult however, is to unanimously decide which of the many details of a given archaeological *in situ* context are worth recording and which are not. Obviously, this decision depends above all on adequate prior observation and differentiation. Both, however, are in turn very much conditioned by personal factors like experience and the ability to mentally transcend and 'reconstruct' the material residues at hand. In short, what qualifies as 'archaeological fact' ranges from plain material objects to what Philip Barker in his excavation manual called "tenuous evidence" of complex contextual makeup (Barker 1993, 104, caption of fig. 31 a).

The historiographical discussion on what constitutes a historical fact was cut short by Evans with his distinction between 'fact' and 'evidence': a fact, he argued, was something in the past which could be verified but whose factuality is independent of

its actual verification by the historian. Facts as such are thus devoid of theoretical implications while evidence is not. According to Evans, evidence is “facts used in support of an argument; and here theory and interpretation do indeed play a constitutive role” (Evans 1997, 76). In other words, “facts thus precede interpretation conceptually, while interpretation precedes evidence” (Evans 1997, 77). According to him and contrary to what Edward Hallett Carr said in his widely read *What is History?* (Carr 1961), “facts and evidence are conceptually distinct and should not be confused with each other” (Evans 1997, 78).

When looking closely on the relationship between archaeological and historical facts it seems hard to deny that the latter pose less problems of factuality than the first. As we have seen, in archaeology both the very outline and structure of features and the determination of relevant elements of context often present difficulties at the factual level. Problems of this kind do not exist in written sources even in their most deficient state. Thus, in contrast to history, some categories of facts in archaeology are definitely generated by a certain amount of interpretation (see also Eggert 2002).

This difference between archaeological and historical sources refers to their respective ‘ontological’ status. While historical facts *sensu* Evans exist independently of the historian, this cannot generally be said of the independence of archaeological facts of the archaeologist. As we have seen, archaeological features must be treated with some reservation in this regard. There still is, however, a difference between this and the context in which archaeological facts are used as evidence *sensu* Evans. In the latter instance the archaeologist is as involved as the historian arguing his case, since it is only his intentions which decide upon which aspect of the fact in question is being used to support which hypothesis.

Remarks on fiction

When it comes to the fiction part of my paper, the overall picture is perhaps a good deal more complex than the question of facts and evidence. The problem here is that the archaeological record, as understood in the present context, consists of material residues without any writing on it. The complete absence or relative rarity of written documents is certainly the most important point of difference between pre- and proto-history on the one hand and history on the other. History is mainly based on written sources. But, contrary to what postmodernist theory says, it is by no means new that texts do not have just one, and unequivocal, meaning. As Evans observed: “An awareness of the multiple meanings of texts, and their relative autonomy from the intentions of the author, has long been part of the stock-in-trade of the historian” (Evans 1997, 103).

It is one thing, however, to admit to the multifaceted nature of written documents. But it is quite another, to deny the past’s written documents and, moreover, the past itself a relevance of its own. This, however, is exactly what postmodernists tend to do. Evans made a considerable effort to refute their claim that “all texts are essentially the same, that there is no difference, for example, between a primary source and a secondary source” (Evans 1997, 114). I think he is quite right in this. Although historical

material may harbor several quite different meanings, it does not follow that it does not have "an integrity of its own" (Evans 1997, 116).

For those who agree, it is beyond doubt that this integrity of historical and, by implication, archaeological material puts certain constraints on its use as evidence in historical and archaeological arguments respectively. As Evans insisted: "A historical source is not the same as a literary text" (Evans 1997, 110). And in the context of the Holocaust debate he said: "Auschwitz was not a discourse. It trivializes mass murder to see it as a text. The gas chambers were not a piece of rhetoric" (Evans 1997, 124). Rather, it was a horrible part of Central European reality in the early 1940s which is being historically studied on the basis of contemporary documents and later oral testimony. According to Evans, even postmodernist historian Hayden White, when faced with charges that his much debated relativism served those who advocated the denial of the Holocaust, retreated from his relativist position in explicitly acknowledging "the primacy of past reality in shaping the way historians write about it" (Evans 1997, 125). But what White actually said was that "we can confidently presume that the facts of the matter set limits on the kinds of stories that can be properly (in the sense of both veraciously and appropriately) told about them". He added, however, that this be so only "if we believe that the events themselves possess a 'story' kind of form and a 'plot' kind of meaning" (White 1992, 39). And he devoted the remainder of his paper to showing that, provided the story conforms to the facts, it is the mode of the plot – e. g. tragic, comic, farcical, epic, romance, etc. – which leads to competing narratives and that, in turn, the emplotment chosen has to live up to the facts⁴. So there is indeed no point here in accusing White of negating the existence of historical facts. It is only that, as he insisted, every story must have a plot and every emplotment is a kind of figuration (White 1997, 47) which sometimes may obscure the borderline between fact and fiction.

In conclusion, the content of past realities' written sources exert a manifest influence on how the reality is interpreted and written about. But this does not help us very much when it comes to the interpretation of archaeological material. Contrary to the majority of historical documents, the non-written sources of archaeology do not tell stories. They are just material remnants of the past. Therefore, it is difficult to cull information from them which goes beyond the immediate material properties of the object or feature itself. As every archaeologist knows, all information beyond this sphere derives first and foremost from the fact that the object or feature in question is considered in the broader context of similar phenomena. Later on, in the process of interpretation, the information thus gained has to be, and is being, supplemented by analogues from a variety of historical and contemporary contexts.

4 Although it is of no relevance for my argument here it should be noted that White argues, as far as the Holocaust and other supposedly unimaginable phenomena are concerned, "that our notion of what constitutes realistic representation must be revised to take account of experiences that are unique to our century and for which older modes of representation have proven inadequate" (White 1997, 52).

The archaeologist as author

My point here in reflecting on the fiction part of the archaeologist's craft relates to the difficulty of mentally and verbally representing a past which is either exclusively or for the most part transmitted through non-written evidence. The question actually is how to proceed under these circumstances: What are the significant elements needed for a historical or, more precisely, a prehistorical account of bygone reality? In contrast to the dynamic character of written sources, prehistoric evidence is rightly considered essentially static (e. g. Eggert 2001, 100-104). One would thus expect a marked difference in the manner of rendering a past based on historical and archaeological evidence respectively. Generally speaking, this is indeed the case.

The point is not that there will be a difference on the level of narrated detail. Rather, it is the structural level of the narrative, growing, as it were, out of the nature of the evidence at hand which is important here. While static archaeological evidence only permits us to devise an anonymous picture of past lifeways without much, if any, recourse to individual actors, written material in general allows us to capture human existence with remarkable immediacy on the individual, collective and corporate level.

All this is, of course, not to say that writing on pre- and protohistory were more fictitious than writing on later times where the pertinent evidence consists mainly of written material. What I am actually implying here is that the discourse in both history and archaeology has to be structured according to its respective sources and thus is different. Therefore, it is hard to conceive of archaeological writing as pieces of art, while this is said, now and then, to be at least partly true for major works of history.

The elusive nature of the archaeological record when it comes to historical interpretation is perhaps best illustrated by what is conventionally called 'princely graves' of Late Hallstatt / Early La Tène. The Hochdorf and Glauberg excavations, to take two very prominent examples, provided spectacular finds as well as a huge quantity of pertinent observations. Yet, for all the quantity and quality of objects and data recovered and recorded, these exceptional graves appear utterly distant from any direct historical grasp (on the Hochdorf grave: e. g. Eggert 1999; Krauß 1999; on the Glauberg graves: Herrmann / Frey / Bartel / Kreuz / Rösch 1997). In fact, we do not even possess, for example, one single contemporary and autochthonous source illuminating the basic functional principles of the societies to which the individuals buried belonged.

It is, interestingly, in the context of the *phénomène princier*, as the French have called it, that archaeological narration comes the closest possible to historical narration in the grand narrative vein⁵. Thus, Wolfgang Kimmig, to cite but the most prominent author, with his extraordinary rhetorical abilities created a historical panorama of Late Hallstatt 'princely' society that stands, to my mind, equal to none (e. g. Kimmig 1983). Later critics, however, have argued that, for all its metaphor and overwhelming imaginative power, his picture was relatively wide off the mark. According to them, it was

5 As will become clear from the following, my use of the term 'grand narrative' is different from A. Megill's understanding for whom it signifies "an authoritative account of History as a whole" or, in another wording of his, "the authoritative account of history generally" (Megill 1995, 161, 152). I conceive of it rather in the manner of what he terms "master narrative", namely "the authoritative account of some particular segment of history" (Megill 1995, 152).

neither sufficiently supported by the archaeological record nor were the theoretical issues involved adequately dealt with. Therefore, in some quarters at least, the general feeling was, and still is, that in Late Hallstatt / Early La Tène studies, as in archaeology at large, time is ripe for an approach combining empirical soundness with adequate reflection of the theoretical aspects implied in interpretation. However, as one critic remarked, a new synthesis in this vein would most probably be closer to past reality, but at the same time would be much less magnificent and perhaps wanting in historical imagination⁶.

In other words, as far as archaeology is concerned there is not much potential for the grand historical narrative. The German classical archaeologist Tonio Hölscher recently observed that during the first half of the twentieth century and well beyond, the "style" of archaeology was influenced and eventually formed by "charismatic seers" or *charismatische Deuter* as he said in German (Hölscher 1995, 206). Today, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that time is running out on charismatic seers in archaeology and, consequently, on grand narratives of the old style as well.

Being sceptical of the grand narrative in archaeology, however, does neither mean being sceptical of the archaeologist as author in general nor to deny the ability of archaeologists to engage in the "big picture of human development through time", even one "painted on a broad canvas", as Andrew Sherratt recently put it (Sherratt 1995, 1). Quite the contrary is true as long as – and this stipulation is essential – this kind of narrative synthesis does not compensate for archaeology's missing direct grasp of the 'human factor' as historical agent with unwarranted speculation in the guise of 'historical intuition'. Archaeology's potential for coherent synthesis is undeniably there and moreover, firmly based syntheses are ever more needed⁷.

My verdict on grand narratives in archaeology is directed at what, in processual times, used to be called 'traditional' archaeology. In the meantime, however, things and the *Zeitgeist* have changed: today, it is the quarters of postmodernist archaeology from which grand narratives of the speculative bent are threatening. This again, however, does not imply that I reject reflection of the archaeologist as author and analysis of the modes of archaeological writing. Neither do I negate the impact of postmodern-

6 "Zu welchem konkreten Ergebnis eine auf einer solchen [explizit vergleichenden kulturalanthropologischen] Perspektive aufbauende Neuinterpretation des 'Fürstengräber'-Phänomens führen wird, läßt sich derzeit noch nicht mit Sicherheit sagen. Es ist allerdings zu vermuten, daß ihr weitgehend der Glanz der traditionellen Deutung, wie sie W. Kimmig so eloquent in zahlreichen Arbeiten vertreten hat, fehlen wird. Das Ergebnis wird somit zwar gewiß unscheinbarer, zugleich aber entschieden besser begründet und abgesichert sein. Vermutlich werden wir dann zwar weniger wissen als wir zuvor zu wissen meinten, aber dafür steht zu erwarten, daß wir dieses Wenige dann mit besseren Gründen wissen" (Eggert 1991, 16).

7 I hope to have made it clear that my rejection of the 'grand narrative' in archaeology does not contradict Sherratt's plea for "*Reviving the Grand Narrative*": what appears contradictory is just a contradiction of words, not of substance. In fact, what he calls "grand narrative" is what I label 'firmly based synthesis'. In his words: "This is essentially what I mean here by having a grand narrative: a sense of the architecture of the human past, why parts of it are different from others, and how they all fit together – not in pursuit of an ultimate goal, but at least in a coherent unfolding" (Sherratt 1995, 1).

ist historical theory on the “scene of writing”, to borrow an expression from Clifford Geertz, in whatever field. In his reflections on *Anthropology and the Scene of Writing* he characterized what he called “perhaps the most intense objection” to postmodernist ideas of writing as the threat “that concentrating our gaze on the ways in which knowledge claims are advanced undermines our capacity to take any of those claims seriously.” And he went on: “Somehow, attention to such matters as imagery, metaphor, phraseology, or voice is supposed to lead to corrosive relativism in which everything is but a more or less clever expression of opinion. Ethnography becomes, it is said, a mere game of words, as poems and novels are supposed to be. Exposing how the thing is done is to suggest that, like the lady sawed in half, it isn’t done at all” (Geertz 1988, 2).

Geertz took exception to this critique of the anthropologist as author, just as I would do for archaeological writing. Analyzing texts written by archaeologists for the better of archaeological epistemology and writing is one thing, however. It is quite another to subscribe to a position where, in a kind of grand narrative of the “domestication” of Europe, the author – echoing Aristotle’s view of the poet’s function – poses as “poet of the Neolithic of Europe” (Hodder 1990, 279).

What argues against the grand narrative in archaeology is, as I hope to have made clear, the limited potential of the archaeological record in this regard. This will not be overcome by any leap of the imagination. Any attempt to follow in the footsteps of grand narratives in history would have to be based on what might be called ‘borrowed life’, i. e., to rely exclusively on analogical reasoning of whatever inspiration for want of pertinent archaeological evidence. However, lack of dynamism, human individuality, inspiration and aspiration in the archaeological record cannot be overcome by searching for ‘suitable’ analogues. Indeed, any attempt at this, quite obviously, would amount to genuine fiction.

Epilogue

As I said at the beginning, we have witnessed an unprecedented evolution of methodological consciousness in archaeology since the 1960s. Like never before, archaeologists have made it plainly clear that there is more to archaeology than just ‘facts’. Today, it is the very nature of these facts that rightly attracts our attention. It seems very obvious indeed that it is no longer warranted to imply a one-to-one relationship between our material evidence and the past in which it originated. Furthermore, we have reason to believe that for much too long a time we thought of archaeology as an empirical discipline based on unequivocal material sources. It has some tradition to contrast our allegedly ‘objective’ sources with the often corrupted, ambiguous, partial and thus highly questionable written documents of history *sensu stricto*. Meanwhile, however, archaeology is beginning to abandon simplistic ideas of this kind and to catch up with the theoretical debate in historiography and beyond.

In historiography, it is generally accepted today that, as Benedetto Croce once put it so strikingly, “true history is contemporary history” (Croce 1959, 227). Archaeologists, however, are only beginning to realize that it is indeed the present which per-

vades and animates our professional interest in cultures long vanished. It seems appropriate, therefore, to abandon the search for final historical truth. We would be better served to be content with the insight that while archaeological data undoubtedly are cumulative, archaeological questions, solutions and their supporting evidence surely are not. Curious as it is that archaeology was so slow in opening itself to the ongoing debate on theory in the humanities at large, its newly acquired open-mindedness is a very positive sign indeed.

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