

Domination and Resistance

Edited by
D. Miller, M. Rowlands and C. Tilley



ONE
WORLD
ARCHAEOLOGY

3

DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE

Edited by

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London and New York

First published in 1989 by Unwin Hyman Ltd

First published in paperback 1995
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Domination and resistance. — (One world
archaeology).

1. Cultural domination. Archaeological
sources

I. Miller, Daniel, 1954- II. Rowlands,

Michael III. Tilley, Christopher

IV. Series

303.3

ISBN 0-415-12254-6

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Domination and resistance/[edited by] D. Miller, M. Rowlands, and C.
Tilley.

p. cm. — (One world archaeology)

Papers from the World Archaeological Congress held in
Southampton, England, in September 1986.

Includes bibliographies and index.

ISBN 0-415-12254-6 (alk. paper)

1. Social archaeology—Congresses. 2. Dominance (Psychology)—
Congresses. 3. Social evolution—Congresses. I. Miller, Daniel,
1954- . II. Rowlands, M.J. III. Tilley, Christopher Y.

IV. World Archaeological Congress (1986: Southampton, Hampshire)

V. Series.

CC72.4D66 1988

930.1—dc 19

88-14440

CIP

Typeset in 10 on 11 point Bembo by Columns of Reading
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
T.J. Press (Padstow) Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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Foreword

This book is one of a major series of more than 20 volumes resulting from the World Archaeological Congress held in Southampton, England, in September 1986. The series reflects the enormous academic impact of the Congress, which was attended by 850 people from more than 70 countries, and attracted many additional contributions from others who were unable to attend in person.

The *One World Archaeology* series is the result of a determined and highly successful attempt to bring together for the first time not only archaeologists and anthropologists from many different parts of the world, as well as academics from a host of contingent disciplines, but also non-academics from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, who could lend their own expertise to the discussions at the Congress. Many of the latter, accustomed to being treated as the 'subjects' of archaeological and anthropological observation, had never before been admitted as equal participants in the discussion of their own (cultural) past or present, with their own particularly vital contribution to make towards global, cross-cultural understanding.

The Congress therefore really addressed world archaeology in its widest sense. Central to a world archaeological approach is the investigation not only of how people lived in the past but also of how, and why, changes took place resulting in the forms of society and culture which exist today. Contrary to popular belief, and the archaeology of some 20 years ago, world archaeology is much more than the mere recording of specific historical events, embracing as it does the study of social and cultural change in its entirety. All the books in the *One World Archaeology* series are the result of meetings and discussions which took place within a context that encouraged a feeling of self-criticism and humility in the participants about their own interpretations and concepts of the past. Many participants experienced a new self-awareness, as well as a degree of awe about past and present human endeavours, all of which is reflected in this unique series.

The Congress was organized around major themes. Several of these themes were based on the discussion of full-length papers which had been circulated some months previously to all who had indicated a special interest in them. Other sessions, including some dealing with areas of specialization defined by period or geographical region, were based on oral addresses, or a combination of precirculated papers and lectures. In all cases, the entire sessions were recorded on cassette, and all contributors were presented with the recordings of the discussion of their papers. A major part of the thinking behind the Congress was that a meeting of many hundreds of participants that did not leave behind a published record of its academic discussions would be little more than an exercise in tourism.

Thus, from the very beginning of the detailed planning for the World Archaeological Congress, in 1982, the intention was to produce post-Congress books containing a selection only of the contributions, revised in the light of discussions during the sessions themselves as well as during subsequent consultations with the academic editors appointed for each book. From the outset, contributors to the Congress knew that if their papers were selected for publication, they would have only a few months to revise them according to editorial specifications, and that they would become authors in an important academic volume scheduled to appear within a reasonable period following the Southampton meeting.

The publication of the series reflects the intense planning which took place before the Congress. Not only were all contributors aware of the subsequent production schedules, but also session organizers were already planning their books before and during the Congress. The editors were entitled to commission additional chapters for their books when they felt that there were significant gaps in the coverage of a topic during the Congress, or where discussion at the Congress indicated a need for additional contributions.

One of the main themes of the Congress was devoted to 'Comparative Studies in the Development of Complex Societies'. The theme was based on discussion of precirculated full-length papers, covering three and a half days, and was under the overall control of Dr Tim Champion, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, and Dr Michael Rowlands, Reader in the Department of Anthropology, University College London. The choice of this topic for a major theme arose from a desire to explore, from a worldwide and interdisciplinary perspective, the assumptions that are embodied in the common use by archaeologists and others of concepts such as 'complex societies', a supposed stage in social development often also assumed to be marked by the invention and wide usage of literacy.

This awareness of the dangers of assuming that archaeological terminology is a precise language consisting of terms which have a single accepted meaning, with well-authenticated qualitative connotations, derived, at least in part, from lessons learnt from the last major interdisciplinary consideration of urbanization in 1970 (Ucko *et al.* 1972) At that time discussion led Stuart Piggott (1972, pp. 948-9) to stress

that we must avoid semantic confusion when we use certain words and names for things. We use the word 'town' or 'city', and in the classical world this was *polis* or *urbs*, and what we have to consider is whether we are falling into that well-known trap of confusing names with actual things, and while using the name embodying modern concepts, we forget that these concepts were not those of literate antiquity, and therefore by reasonable assumption not of non-literate antiquity. Consider for instance the Latin use of *urbs* in relation to the Celtic population of barbarian Europe. What did a Latin writer really mean when he called a hill-fort, *urbs*, as indeed on occasion they did? It did not mean it was like Rome, although he used the same word

for the city, the Imperial City, as he would for this barbarian earthwork enclosure, the functions of which, or the functions of any hill-fort, we very imperfectly understand. Let us avoid the ancient belief in the magic power of words, which can make us turn names into real things, and so fulfil a primitive conviction that when you have given a thing a name you have a command over it, like knowing someone's secret name. It is possible to persuade oneself that having named a concept, therefore, it actually exists and can be dealt with accordingly.

The overall theme therefore took as its starting point the assumption that the concept of social complexity needed to be re-examined and probably refined. A narrow parochial approach to the past, which simply assumes a European development to urbanization and literacy as the valid criterion for defining a complex society, totally ignores the complexity of non-literate civilizations and cultures such as the Inca of Peru or that of Benin in Nigeria. However, a world archaeological approach to a concept such as that of social complexity focuses attention on precisely those features which archaeologists all too often take for granted.

Discussions during the Congress were grouped around five main headings and have led to the publication of three books. The first subtheme, organized by Barbara Bender, Department of Anthropology, University College London, was concerned with 'The Development of Complexity'; the second, under the control of Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley, also of the Department of Anthropology, University College London, was on 'Modes of Domination', and the third, organized by Michael Rowlands, was on 'European Expansion and the Archaeology of Capitalism'. The contributions from these three subthemes which were discussed on two different days, form this book. The fourth subtheme on 'Centre-Periphery Relations', which was discussed for one day, is edited by its organizer, Timothy Champion, under the title *Centre and periphery*. More than a day was devoted to the fifth subtheme, 'State and Society; the Emergence, Development and Transformation of Forms of Social Hierarchy, Class Relations and Political Centralization', which has been edited by its organizers, John Gledhill of the Department of Anthropology, University College London, and Mogens Larsen of the Centre for Research in the Humanities, Copenhagen, Denmark, with Barbara Bender, under the title *State and society*.

The approach adopted within the overall theme of 'Comparative Studies in the Development of Complex Societies' was based on a consideration of the *processes* involved in the creation and establishment of the elements of social organization, and social activities, which archaeologists and others commonly claim to be the visible end results of the activities of complex societies. In a comparative context, attention is focused on the reasons why, and mechanisms by which, the non-literate civilizations of, for example the Inca of Peru, built and maintained some 23 000 km of 'roads' and what their function was within the sociopolitical state system of some 6-12 million peoples with diverse backgrounds and identities who lived in

environmental conditions as different as the desert and the High Andes. Within the non-literate Inca state, political control of heterogeneous social groups was achieved by an hierarchical system of regional administrative centres with an inevitable complexity of relations existing between centres and the hinterland. Given this complexity, which exists in the absence of literacy in the Inca state, the traditional focus of the study of complex societies on the better-known literate 'civilizations' of the Old World appears odd and misguided.

If the traditional assumptions about 'complexity' can thus be discarded, so too can the equally traditional, and virtually exclusive, emphasis on development and evolution. The conventional concern with determining where and when 'state' and 'class' originated, gives way to more fundamental questions about the processes of long-term social change and the very complex relationships which exist between social and cultural identity and perception, order, and development.

Key concepts in such an approach, essential to our understanding of the relevant social processes, are those of 'authority' and 'power'. Contributors to the theme on 'Comparative Studies of the Development of Complex Societies' examined both concepts in an attempt to disentangle any Eurocentric assumptions embedded in the terms themselves, and also to describe precisely the forms which power and authority may take in other societies, both today and in the past.

Inherent in all of the contributions is the assumption that social relations have never been any more equal and symmetrical in societies in the past than they are in contemporary societies. Many of the perspectives adopted in these books explore the details of these asymmetrical relations, considering not only the variety of forms that have been adopted over different times and in different parts of the world, but also the different mechanisms which have been employed to bolster and reinforce such inequalities. With such inequalities in the distribution of power, and in access to knowledge, come equally varied forms of control over symbolism, ritual, religious cults, and even literacy.

A particular focus of interest therefore lies in the detailed exploration of the different forms and functions of literacy in different societies, an exploration that clearly reveals that these were in no way uniform and that literacy, in itself, cannot be used as a clear marker of social qualitative development (see *Who needs the past?* edited by R. Layton) – to be able to read and write is not, in itself, to be a member of a qualitatively complex society.

Another form of inherent asymmetry in human societies derives from centre-periphery relations. The presence at the Congress of so many participants from the so-called Third and Fourth Worlds made it possible to examine in detail these relations in a very wide variety of forms, in particular those frequently glossed over in the archaeological literature under rubrics such as 'civilized'/'barbarian', 'urban'/'non-urban', sedentary/nomadic, and agriculturalist/pastoralist.

In focusing on the nature of the varying relationships that can develop between centre and periphery, one is led inevitably to detailed questions

about imperialism, colonialism and acculturation. In part these forms of relationships are a matter of ideology (of 'empire', of 'nation' and of ethnic groups), but it is the mechanisms of expansion, incorporation and maintenance which are clearly vital to our understanding of the past and present, and which are examined by several contributors.

In this book Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands, Christopher Tilley and their contributors analyse, from an impressive variety of contexts – including China, Mexico and Madagascar – what would colloquially be referred to as 'power bases'. As in several of the other books in the *One World Archaeology* series, the approach adopted is interdisciplinary. It also incorporates many of the principles and data derived from the study of societies and cultures of the modern world. *Domination and resistance* goes far beyond the concerns of the so-called 'New Archaeology' which emphasized cross-cultural generalization and the behavioural correlates of unitary processes underlying the formation of the archaeological record. The concern is both with sociocultural specificity and with a comparative framework for understanding. As the title of this book suggests, the social processes under discussion are as relevant today, and to the understanding of contemporary societies, as they must have been throughout the past.

As with *State and society*, edited by J. Gledhill, B. Bender and M. T. Larsen, the contributions in this book reveal, with striking clarity, the way that many of the preconceptions in the archaeological and anthropological use of terminology such as 'complex societies' are not only subjectively based and the product of a particular European historical experience, but have also shaped what we view as desirable 'pasts', as well as our attitudes towards peoples and cultures 'without histories'. The book demonstrates the Eurocentrism of ideas about 'civilized identity' with, in some cases, a smattering of Near Eastern Orientalism thrown in. Domination, as we all know, may take many subtle forms – operating through conceptual imperialism – not only by means of physical force. *Domination and resistance* challenges its readers to examine the nature of their preconceptions about development, and questions the legitimacy of many of our most cherished assumptions and views about 'other cultures' and about the place of European cultures on any scale of social and political development.

Some of the subtle manifestations of past systems of domination may come as a surprise, as may also the realization of how central a concept 'style' remains in archaeological enquiry and analysis (and see *The meanings of things*, edited by Ian Hodder, and *Animals into art*, edited by Howard Morphy). A secure identification and understanding of the processes leading to stylistic differentiation, and the subsequent correct interpretation of their use and consequences, may make the difference between seeing Palaeolithic social groups as essentially localized and isolated, versus essentially ritual-sharing and periodically conglomerate, or perceiving the Aztec period as having *continued* a prior situation of factionalism versus the Aztec period having *developed its own* unique form of competitive interactions.

A particular form of insidious conceptual domination applies to the kind, and nature, of archaeological conceptualization, both as it has been

applied to, and in, non-European areas and countries. Conceptualizing the past (and see *Conflict in the archaeology of living traditions* and *Who needs the past?*, both edited by Robert Layton) in a particular form, both with regard to the nature of the past and its potential application in current conditions, spheres and problems, has led to a peculiarly slanted approach to what archaeological evidence is, and what is not, of research interest and potential. In this way whole areas of a people's or nation's past may be relegated to a level of supposed total unimportance, with no realization of the dispossession and domination that this may cause to the identities and aspirations of a group, society, or even country.

In a strangely powerful way, therefore, the discipline of archaeology can have a special responsibility in the creation and dispossession of identity (and see *Archaeological approaches to cultural identity*, edited by Stephen Shennan) – whether it be through the ascription of well-worn concepts such as tribalism or the new (almost as imprecise) one of ethnicity. Of course, all of this raises, in acute form, another of the consequences of developments since the 'New Archaeology', namely the fact that archaeologists must now first recognize, and then investigate, the problems which are relevant to the wider community. In doing so archaeologists now accept that the nature of archaeological data leads to subjective interpretation, and that all such interpretation is bound to be value-loaded. The point at issue is to recognize what these values are, not simply to suspect subjectivity and therefore to shy away from interpretation.

Domination and resistance deals with some of the most important of the social and political processes which exist, and it forces into the open a consideration of the values that are commonly, and often unconsciously or semi-consciously, ascribed to them. The kind of archaeology presented here is a challenging one – and one which cannot help but cause us to stop in our stride, and to reflect.

P. J. Ucko
Southampton

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Preface

This book is one of three which have emerged from five days of discussion held at the World Archaeological Congress in Southampton in 1986. As already mentioned in the Foreword, the original concern of the session was with comparative studies in the development of complex societies. It may therefore appear surprising that the term 'complexity' does not arise in this or any of the other titles of the subsequent volumes. This is because one of the conclusions of our discussions was to agree to deconstruct this overgeneralized category which has all too often been assumed as unproblematic, providing a 'common-sense' basis for comparing social forms.

The aim of the discussion at the Congress was to consider how to return attention to the more specific problems raised by the concept of complexity for studies of historical transformation and social reproduction, while evading some of the unfortunate legacies of its ancestry within unilinear evolutionary theory. One of these has been the tendency to assume a direct association between complexity and inequality, often using concepts such as stratification or social control as if they were of general and universal importance rather than the product of a given set of historical circumstances. This book focuses on forms of domination and resistance as more flexible concepts, although it must still be recognized that, like any others, the terms suffer from the dangers of reification and abstraction unless systematically explored, modified and developed through comparative understanding of cultural variation and difference. The main concern was with archaeological investigations and contributions to this area. However, it is increasingly being realized that archaeology can only contribute to such an issue if it does so within the framework of interdisciplinary analysis and conceptualization. Artificially maintained academic boundaries create a very real constraint on understanding, and it is increasingly important that they be undermined. One of the most positive features of the World Archaeological Congress was precisely its emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration of global scope.

In this book we have included a broad collection of chapters from archaeology, anthropology, ethnohistory, social theory and historical sociological analysis to consider general questions of the relationship of dominance and resistance to complexity. There is no *a priori* reason why the specificity of disciplinary allegiances should not be enhanced by a more general concern with major issues in understanding the nature of social forms. All of the chapters were presented for discussion at our sessions, except that by Tilley, which replaces his contribution in the volume of precirculated papers. The chapters by Friedman, Hall and Kohl were precirculated, although the authors were not present for the discussions. The book was scheduled to appear in the summer of 1988, but because of

a series of delays that were beyond our control, including the loss of proofs in the post, it has not been possible to publish it until the spring of 1989.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by a number of people, both in the organization of the original sessions held at the World Archaeological Congress at Southampton and in the subsequent preparation of this book. In particular, we would like to thank Phil Kohl for helping to organize the session on European expansion and the archaeology of capitalism, and John Gledhill, Mogens Larsen and Thomas Patterson for chairing sessions. Of course, we have had to select from a wide range of stimulating and substantial papers, in order to construct a thematic volume. We would like to thank all those contributors who are not represented in this book for their support. We are much indebted to Caroline Jones and Paul Crake for their tremendous help in organizing both the sessions and the subsequent editorial labours. Finally, none of this could, of course, have been possible without the indefatigable and enthusiastic support of Peter Ucko.

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Introduction

DANIEL MILLER, MICHAEL ROWLANDS
and CHRISTOPHER TILLEY

The issue of 'complexity' has been in the forefront of archaeological investigation since the inception of the discipline. It is clearly premised in innumerable discussions concerned with the origin of the state, civilization, literacy or urbanization. Consideration of these problems of origin have almost always, at least implicitly, been bound up with conceptions of general evolution which remain one of the most powerful legacies of 19th-century thought pervading contemporary archaeology.

We suggest that there have been two main trajectories in the attempt to deal with the issues raised within such a broad interdisciplinary framework. The one that dominates contemporary archaeological theory and practice has been an attempt to tackle the notion of complexity head-on by the construction of a large series of abstract modelling procedures which produce a 'logic' of complexity against which actual historical developments may be compared. In a number of recent volumes (e.g. Renfrew & Cooke 1979, van der Leeuw 1981) which have as their ultimate justification the use of archaeological materials to investigate issues of social complexity, the direct focus of attention has been mathematical modelling and the construction of formal abstract models. Often terms such as 'managers', 'hierarchies' or 'peer-polity' interaction are used, but in a sense which has very little to do with their social connotations. Similarly, the use of information theory or catastrophe theory has tended very strongly to obscure rather than aid a consideration of the irreducibly social dimensions of complexity. The mathematical sophistication of the models used is not matched by an equal sophistication in their 'translation' into social terms. Indeed, it has become quite apparent that mathematical logic cannot replace sociological understanding, and contributes little towards this goal. When attempts are made to effect such a translation it is often through devices evoking concepts of 'simple' and 'complex' societies which repeat the worst excesses of the discourse of primitivism and general evolution.

An alternative trajectory, taken up in this book, is based on the presumption that all concepts such as complexity, when used properly within the social sciences, are about the forms taken by social relations. The goal of such academic study is the concrete comparative study of social relations (Rowlands 1982). By this we refer to detailed studies that emphasize understanding the nature of societal differences and the conditions that promote societal change and continuity while eschewing objectivist tendencies to work solely towards the production of high-level cross-cultural generalizations. The utility of the concepts we use and the manner in which we employ them have to be constantly subjected to these criteria. Any attempt to produce reified abstract categories as ends in