A CRITIQUE OF
Archaeological
Reason

Structural, Digital, and Philosophical Aspects
of the Excavated Record

GIORGIO BUCCELLATI

A CRITIQUE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL REASON

In *A Critique of Archaeological Reason*, Giorgio Buccellati presents a theory of excavation that aims at clarifying the nature of archaeology and its impact on contemporary thought. Integrating epistemological issues with methods of data collection and the role and impact of digital technology on archaeological work, the book explores digital data in order to comprehend its role in shaping meaning and understanding in archaeological excavation. The ability of archaeologists to record in the field, rather than offsite, has fundamentally changed the methods of observation, conceptualization, and interpretation of deposits. Focusing on the role of stratigraphy as the center of archaeological field work, Giorgio Buccellati examines the challenges of interpreting a 'broken tradition'; a civilization for which there are no living carriers today. He uses the site of Urkesh in Syria, where he has worked for decades, as a case study to demonstrate his theory.

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To Iko,
present at creation

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Preface

The inquiry into the nature of archaeology and its theoretical presuppositions leads to unexpected results.

The question about its nature is a question about distinctiveness: What is unique about the discipline that sets it apart from others? The question about theoretical presuppositions relates to the conditions that make this distinctiveness possible: What is the frame of reference within which such uniqueness can best be understood?

Unexpected results are reached when one sees archaeological reason emerge as an independent dimension of human reason and become a mode of thought. As such, it affects the way in which we view reality, so that the theoretical presuppositions loom even larger and require a correspondingly fuller elaboration.

In articulating this line of thought, I have been following *two parallel paths*, which have conditioned over the years my own personal itinerary.

On the one hand, there was my long-standing confrontation with field-work and my ongoing reflection about it. It is the most concrete of situations, in which the urgency of practical matters and the scope of cultural results is often so daunting as to rob us of the mental space we need to reflect on theory. And yet reflect we must.

On the other hand, and intrinsic to this reflection, there was the urge for coherence, a coherence that draws on general systems of principles. This is the most abstract of reflections, but one that, in this case, was always deeply rooted in the materiality of its object. It was like trying to make sense of the effort to make sense: methodology at its best.

It was also an ongoing process. The act of excavation had its own rhythm: one could not stop and get off. Thus the theoretical reflection had to proceed apace. What ensued was an intense *cross-fertilization between practice and theory*. It often left to me reaching a standstill, but never, in

effect, an interruption. The abiding confidence in the value of the system, if coherently conceived, always carried the day.

This reinforced the conviction that abstraction, properly conceived, was on the side of concreteness. The underpinning lay in the concern for structure, described in and of itself, on the one hand, and tenaciously applied to the multiplicity of phenomena with which we were confronted, on the other. It was greatly reinforced by the ongoing concern to preserve the site through a committed conservation effort and to make the results accessible through an equally committed program of site presentation.

The concern for a theory of excavation was matched by a very early interest in the new conceptualization made possible by the growing availability of *the digital medium*. This, too, proposed a special blend of abstraction and concreteness. The firmness of an anchor could be found not in the apparent solidity of the digital technique (belied too frequently by the otherwise welcome cascading of upgrades), but in the cogency of the conceptual framework the medium was called to serve.

This confrontation, and my taking direct charge of the pertinent programming, provided the groundwork for a deepening insight into the very nature of digitality and its relation to the archaeological record, seen especially in its most creative moment, the unveiling of the stratigraphic nexus. The match was far greater than merely functional. What emerged was an unexpected secret kinship between the earth and the chip: archaeological reason could be considered intrinsically digital, and vice versa.

The concern for the structural cohesiveness of the whole is an integral part of a *linguistic research* aimed at seeing regularities as carriers of meaning. It extends to literature as well, where the analysis probes the most explicit measures of self-expression available for cultures that can no longer rely on living bearers. This elicited a higher level of awareness for the need to acknowledge the brokenness of a cultural tradition and for the equivalent need to devise adequate interpretive channels.

That is why there was more than a superficial link between linguistics and archaeology. Linguistics provided a model for defining a coherent grammatical approach and for showing how a structural understanding of a given whole goes beyond explaining the details of the component parts: it consistently helped me see, beneath the apparent fragmentation, an overarching unity as being itself a carrier of meaning.

The overall direction of these efforts was in many ways sustained by an underlying sensitivity for *the philosophical dimension*. In the first place, this provided the scaffolding for the theoretical archaeological construct I was developing: it sustained the belief that the search for a system was indeed

not an end in itself, based on mere formalism, but was rather the spring that could release the self-display of unsuspected inner coherences within the complexity of the record.

It was a process of hermeneutics. And in this regard the notion of archaeological reason emerged as a special kind of human reason, one capable of throwing light on the broader issue of the hermeneutic framework, once we are forced to look beyond the availability of living carriers endowed with native competence. This seemed to open a door to a significant contribution that archaeology could make to philosophy.

* * *

Thus it is that different concerns intersect each other at the root level in the overall argument of this book – archaeological, digital and philosophical concerns, along with a sensitivity for the linguistic dimension. The corresponding conceptual realms require a special commitment in two directions.

First, archaeology, digitality, philosophy and linguistics are distant from each other in terms of the subject matter they address, and even more importantly in terms of their modality of study and sensitivity for the substance of the problems that emerge. Thus each requires a full immersion in a mode of thought that is highly distinctive and draws on compartmentalized methods and procedures.

Second, these fields are all profoundly relevant to each other with regard to the core issues I am taking up, in such a way that the interconnections affect the depth and substance of the central argument, not just the surface and the form of expression. Thus each depends on the other, and this interaction must be confronted in full if one wishes to arrive at a full understanding of the core issues that are being proposed.

I have striven for thoroughness in addressing both concerns, in ways that I would like to clarify.

There is in the book, I believe, a coherence that cuts across boundaries and gives unity to the whole. Keeping this coherence intact remained at all times at the center of my effort. I did not mean to write separate treatises on archaeology, digitality and philosophy, showing then a posteriori, and thus extrinsically, what links there may be among them. Rather, I meant to keep in focus the centrality of the goal that was at all times shared by the diverse approaches and sensitivities. The enrichment of diversity was palpable, as progress in one area was strengthened by an insight in another. It was the same sense of enrichment that the writing should be able to preserve and communicate.

This is another way to speak of interdisciplinarity. If it makes sense for an archaeologist to seriously entertain an in-depth reading of Kant; or for a philosopher to be exposed to details about emplacement and deposition; or for an IT specialist to reflect on how dirt archaeology speaks to the issue of digitality – if all of this is to make sense, it is because a confrontation that happens at the root level provokes infinitely more than one that hovers at the surface with easy generalizations.

For this reason I feel that the extensive treatments I give of diverse topics are not detours. They are necessary in constructing the larger and longer argument. I have sought to bring this out first of all in the logical development of the argument by stressing, in the body of the text, the interconnection of the different strands. There are anticipations and reprises, where the same topic is viewed from different points of view; there are transitions aiming to highlight the connections; and there is an abundance of internal cross-references, intended to assist the reader in keeping the larger picture in mind while going through the details.

There is also, however, a coherence within the single treatments of the individual themes. Parts I through III deal more specifically with archaeology, Part IV with the digital aspect and Part V with philosophy. Each can serve as a point of entry into the main argument. As such, each part can be read on its own merits, although the full implications can only be brought out by the way in which they cohere with the larger argument that is being developed.

For instance, the restrictive definition I give of archaeology, which is at the basis of the whole argument, is explained in archaeological terms in the first three parts – and I believe that it does rest convincingly on its own terms. But a full theoretical justification emerges only from a serious confrontation with the digital and philosophical considerations of Parts IV and V. Similarly, the elaboration, in Part V, of the relevance of structure in Kant should hopefully be of interest as it stands for a philosopher, but its full valence and broader significance for contemporary thought, as I see it, would only emerge in light of the description of archaeological reason, which in turn can only be argued on the basis of the details given in the first three parts.

* * *

The points I have raised indicate how the book is conceived: in the form of a long essay, with an emphasis on the unfolding of a central argument. The theoretical dimension is clearly in the foreground. It differs from current trends in archaeological theory in that it seeks to identify the intellectual presuppositions of that very theory, which I do not explicitly confront here as such. I provide only a minimum of

exemplification in the course of the essay, and then in a very simplified manner, partly because of space constraints, but also in the belief that the flow of the argument may run smoothly enough to effectively present the case.

Another reason for the style adopted is that the book provides the theoretical foundations on all three levels (archaeological, digital and philosophical) for what is in effect the practical counterpart of this essay, namely the *Urkesh Website*. Thus, while the presentation given here is formulated in very abstract terms, there is a kind of mirror image that is concrete to the utmost.

What I have said about exemplification pertains also to documentation. In particular, bibliographical references are meant to open a window onto a quantity of materials that are quite vast and differentiated. The bibliography and the references given here must be considered only as indicative, illustrating a specific issue or pointing to a trend in the field. Full coverage of relevant works will be found in the separate dedicated website that accompanies this volume.

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The gestation period of this work was long, extending over three decades and more, and as a result the persons and institutions involved in making it possible are beyond counting. Thus the pleasure of expressing my gratitude must be limited.

The staff of the Terqa and Urkesh excavations project, all of them, bore the brunt of the ongoing struggle to keep practice in synchrony with theory. Between enthusiasm and disbelief, the confrontation they offered me was, at all times, thought provoking in the most specific sense of the term: it provoked me to face discontinuities and incongruities, to manage the daily dirt in the ground while aiming for the ultimate purity of theory, to put in balance the expectation that there would eventually be an answer to all questions with the urgency of actually answering the immediate questions of the here and now.

In a most special way this affected the Terqa co-director and Urkesh director, my wife, Marilyn. Loyal to the grand design of the theory, and yet in need of more immediate results, she went flawlessly through the untold moments of transition, keeping full control of the enormous mass of data. In so doing, she gave the staff the needed reassurance that the effort was all and always worth it.

Away from the field, I had the converse experience. It derived from the need to explain to colleagues and students why details relating to field work

should matter in a theoretical discussion that broaches matters of philosophy and digitality. In this regard, I am especially grateful to colleagues, postdocs and advanced students who took a very active part in an engaging research project devoted to the Hermeneutics of Archaeology within the Philosophy Department at the Catholic University of Milan, Italy.

The anonymous readers provided very insightful comments on the core substance of the text, in all its various aspects, and I am most grateful to them for their critique, which has helped me greatly in the revision of the original manuscript. I am also grateful to Laerke Recht for her help with the final editing of the Index, and especially for her work on the bibliography and on the companion website. In addition, I benefited over these many years from the comments of a number of colleagues with whom I have shared the text in various stages of completion. For their detailed critique, I am especially grateful to Tamara Japaridze, Eric Kansa and David C. Schindler.

Because of the deep interconnection between the theoretical framework developed here and its verification through field work, I have depended deeply on the funding that made such field work possible: in a very concrete way, it was such funding that made this book possible. I leave for the *Urkesh Website* a detailed acknowledgment of these indispensable sources of support, while here I will mention only those that have more specifically contributed to the theoretical dimension of the research: the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA; the UCLA Transdisciplinary Seed Grant Forum within the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research; the Faculty Research Grant program of the UCLA Senate Committee on Research; the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Emeritus Fellowship Program; the Office of Research of the Catholic University of Milan; and IIMAS – The International Institute for Mesopotamian Area Studies. To all goes my heartfelt gratitude for a support that sustained the research momentum in more ways than just financial, important as this always was.

* * *

"Present at creation:" Iko and this book took their first steps together. This "creation" was not a single moment, but a long process, and throughout this period he was unfailingly present, with a presence defined by his loving identification with a project constant only in its drive to take shape. Thus it is that he became the closest and most faithful interlocutor, the one who most closely understood the deeper and most urgent goals of the enterprise. Dedicating the book to him crowns this unique collaboration at the same time that it gives voice to the depth of the bond of affection that unites us.

Introduction

1.1 The Themes

1.1.1 A Dual Definition of Archaeology

Central to the argument of this book are the two themes reflected in the dual definition of archaeology (2.2).

The first is restrictive, and relates specifically to archaeology as field work: it considers as properly archaeological only the moment when the excavator identifies a contact in the ground, and dissolves that very contact by virtue of observing and recording it (see Carver 2011). The inferential reasoning as to how things came to be where they are, giving origin to the contact being observed, is the second moment that is properly archaeological. In both cases, "properly archaeological" means that no other discipline faces this particular set of circumstances. This gives rise to significant epistemological concerns, and it is in this regard that this theme may be seen as dealing specifically with a full-fledged and exclusive *theory* of excavation.

The second definition is derivative, and uses the first as a metaphor for going beyond the immediacy of field work. Just as the physical remains buried in the ground have been severed from the living contexts within which they functioned in their pristine state, so we are led to consider in a special way a culture for which there are no living persons who can claim native competence in that same culture. These broken traditions present therefore a very special interpretive problem, one that is quite similar to that faced by a linguist who deals with a so-called "dead" language, which only means the natively competent speakers of that language are dead, while the language as such can be seen at all times as a living organism.

From this dual definition derive two important corollaries that can be seen as themes in their own right – one describes the way in which the two definitions can be applied structurally to the data, through grammar and hermeneutics (1.1.2); the other focuses on what the two definitions have in common, namely archaeological reason (1.1.4).

1.1.2 *Referentiality: Grammar and Hermeneutics*

The notion of referentiality plays a major role in my whole argument. It is described in detail in the latter part of the book (see sections 14.7 and 14.8), but its essential core is simple: a system may be analyzed either in its own internal structural integrity or as relating to an external referent. A grammar describes the system structurally from the first point of view, while hermeneutics seeks to define its relationship (always in structural terms) to the outer referent.

The notion of a "grammatical" understanding recurs frequently in the book, and it reflects a use that is more complex than may appear at first. On the surface, the term "grammar" may in fact evoke a straightjacket approach to reality, where rules are imposed externally without consideration for the inner life of the object of study. Instead, grammar is seen here as the sensitive articulation of the filaments that hold an organism together: instead of suffocating the spirit, it brings out, in reasoned and arguable ways, its constitutive elements and their profound relationship.

Hermeneutics can be viewed as building on grammar since it places the structured whole described by grammar in relation to an outside referent. Presupposing that the living organism is grammatically conceptualized, it seeks to find the hidden motor that gives the organism its thrust to life. This is the outside referent, the hidden motor or the inner spring that sets everything in motion and holds it together. The role of inference looms large, and introduces a stronger element of risk than in a grammatical argument: it is the hermeneutic risk, of which our archaeological discourse will help highlight the power where one might otherwise see it instead as a weakness.

1.1.3 *The Value and Limits of Positivism*

The grammar that defines and describes the archaeological record brings out forcefully the very special status of properly archaeological "data," which is understood as "non-data" (8.5). Ultimately, if paradoxically, we may say that we do not have empirical archaeological evidence, even at the very

moment when archaeology seems to deal instead with that which is most
fully tangible – bricks and stones and clay and metal. The restrictiveness of
the first definition plays a role here, because it is the lability of the contact in
the ground that claims the status of proper archaeological evidence. This in
itself has a rather diminished positivist dimension, and all the more so as we
envisage the effort of hermeneutics, so tightly bound with inference.

But archaeological grammar and hermeneutics are solidly anchored in
a reasoned argument. And this may in turn be regarded as the deeper
answer to a positivist urge: We can positively follow the argumentative
trail, and trace both the observational itinerary of the excavator and the
inferential conclusions that are drawn from it (see also Shanks and Tilley
1992: especially ch. 2).

1.1.4 Archaeological Reason

This brings us to a question that represents a core theme of this book;
indeed, one that is enshrined in the book's very title : is there an archae-
ological reason, and if so how can it be precisely defined? My answer is
clearly positive, and the whole issue has a deeper valence than it may seem
at first. Precisely because of the lability of the initial "data," and even more
because of the effort at bridging the yawning gap between us and broken
traditions, archaeological reason can be seen as a very special dimension of
pure human reason. In fact, (1) it rests on data whose empirical status is
highly filtered, and (2) it proceeds in the interpretive effort of human
experience without the benefit of a living self-interpreting tradition relating
to that very experience. As such, it poses a challenge not only to historical
thought, but also to philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutic philo-
sophy (Gadamer 1976; Davey 2006; Figal 2006).

It is in this respect that archaeology may be seen as providing a substantial
new contribution to philosophy. A serious confrontation with Kant's thought
lies at its basis (Kant 1781; 1788; 1790), but it goes beyond it too, as the notion
of archaeological reason opens a different dialog with a number of modern
trends of thought, from structuralism to hermeneutics. In this book I have
developed some thoughts along these lines, and to these topics ample space is
given in the companion website (1.3).

1.1.5 Structure

The direct confrontation with Kant was enlightening, especially because it
fostered a deeper understanding of the great relevance of the concept of

structure (see especially Part V). It is a notion not generally associated with Kant's name, but I think that it opens a wide window to aspects of his thoughts that can be seen more vividly in this perspective.

While structuralism has faded as a fashion, its intellectual import remains more than valid. I argue this throughout the book: the identification of structural cohesiveness is in fact at the basis of both the grammatical and the hermeneutic approach I am proposing. It is in this regard that the use of linguistics as a heuristic model is particularly productive.

1.1.6 Archaeological Theory and Method

While the book is devoted specifically to theory and method, it does not reflect the mainstream of the discipline in this regard (see Cooney 2009). In the discipline, little if any attention is paid to the topics I am raising here, and conversely I do not deal explicitly with the major trends in the field. I also do not take up a confrontation with the few attempts that have been made to link directly philosophy with archaeology. Such an apparent neglect is not due to a lack of interest on my part, but only to what I perceive as the need to focus more explicitly on the central core of archaeological theory and method, a core that is not in the sight of the field.

A comprehensive approach to these other trends in the field is found in the companion website (1.3), where in addition to an extensive annotated bibliography one will find a number of different excursuses that cover precisely these parallel views on theory and method. Since the website will remain open and active, it will continue to develop further insights on these issues, thus representing a broad, collaborative effort.

1.1.7 Digitality

As with archaeological theory and method, my approach to the digital dimension in archaeology is also non-standard. This is so not so much because I do not take up the implementation aspect that is generally associated with the notion of digital archaeology, but also because, when dealing with the theoretical dimension, I emphasize aspects that are not in the forefront of current literature. Significantly, an interest in these aspects is suggested by the very effort at dealing with the archaeological record. In other words, I look at digitality from the perspective of what archeology contributes to it, rather than the other way around. What I have called (in Part IV) the "privileged venue" is not meant in the sense that digital publication is privileged over other publications, but in the sense that the

archaeological record extends a benefit to digitality by virtue of the uniqueness of its nature. Thus I will propose, paradoxically as it may seem at first, the notion that archaeological thought is *natively* digital (13.1).

A special aspect of digitality that is tightly linked to my effort is the implementation of websites that expand in a properly digital manner the argument proposed in this book. This points to the intellectual dimension of a web-and-browser-oriented venue for the development of a scholarly argument – with an emphasis, once again, not on the technical aspect of the implementation, but rather on its methodological dimension.

1.1.8 Critique

I have taken seriously the term "critique" that appears in the title of this work. Far from catering to catchy terminology or providing a simple historical detour, the concern for a critical approach is rooted in what I perceive to be the need to establish a more solid frame of reference for the field. Qua *Critique*, the book is therefore propaedeutic in its attempt to provide a venue for a systemic accounting of the excavator's observations in their totality, thereby offering the primary tool we need to achieve an adequate degree of objectivity.

The notion of archaeological reason, which is the logical counterpart of the notion of critique, is justified precisely because it arises from a "critical" awareness. Conversely, it is the confrontation with archaeology that has given rise to a deeper understanding of the central role that a critique, in the narrow sense of the term, can still play in modern thought.

1.2 The Argument

The main themes I have just described are woven into a coherent "long argument" which proceeds from a review of the basic principles and presuppositions, through a consideration of the ways in which they affect the "data" and the question of their digital embodiment, to conclude with the philosophical context within which the argument can best be situated. Below I show how the argument develops through the various parts of the book.

The formal dimension of the grammar is constitutive of the very notion of archaeology as I envisage it. In other words, grammar is by no means a mere frame for the orderly presentation of the material, but it is rather an epistemological construct that defines the very nature of the archaeological universe. This is the argument developed in the Part I of the book, which

focusses on FUNDAMENTALS. The process of stratigraphic excavation entails that data are not in fact given (paradoxically, the data are not "data"! – see Hodder and Hutson 2003: 146); They are the construct of the excavator's observational itinerary (8.5). The grammar is the charter that guides this itinerary, and it is in this sense that it is *constitutive* of the "data." What is "found" is really not a jar or a floor, but the spatial link between the jar and the floor – and this is not visible (hence it is not "given") before the two are disengaged from the matrix in which they are placed, nor is it any longer visible after they have been so disengaged. Their "emplacement" is far from self-evident: it does not declare itself, but it emerges as a phenomenon (literally, something visible) only because it is so declared by the excavator. And for this declaration to be epistemologically valid (to be subject to arguable canons of knowledge, to be "scientific") it has not only to be constructed, but to be traceable. On this rests any further claim to objectivity and meaning.

How this differs from the application of standard methods of ANALYSIS to archaeology is discussed in Part II. The primary task of archaeology in a strict sense is the study of elements in contact in the ground, direct and indirect. At first blush, this appears to be the *only* task of archaeology, in the sense that it is the one that is not the purview of any other discipline. The archaeological paradox is that the data are not given as such (15.10.2); they are rather made into data at the moment they are first observed. A jar is obviously identifiable as an object with its own independent status (typologically), but it is not an *archaeological* object. That it becomes only when it is observed in its immediate contact with other items. Nor is the contact immediately self-evident: it is reified; i.e., made into a part of the data at the moment of the observation, a moment that is then just as immediately lost. The crux of emplacement analysis is therefore to show how to keep track of the observational itinerary in ways that are clearly defined and demonstrable. On this builds the process of depositional analysis, the two together constituting the process of stratigraphic analysis, and then in turn typological and integrative analysis, which are based on a progressively greater distance from the initial emplacement analysis.

Once the "data" have been identified ("declared"), they have to be communicated, made public, "published." I place the term in quotes because, while it elicits primarily the notion of a presentation on paper or a digital medium, a full archaeological "publication" must entail other aspects as well, which are not usually considered under this heading. This complex of avenues through which the "data" are shared, the topic of Part III, I call the REASSEMBLED CONSTRUCT: it is an organic whole of seemingly

disparate functions, that must, however, all be taken into account and declared; i.e., "published." In this book I do not address the operational aspect (I deal with this in the companion website (1.3)). Rather I aim to show the theoretical dimension of each of these venues: how does one *dispose* of the elements, from discarding to storing them; how should one care for their physical *preservation* in function not only of a social and ethical responsibility, but also of a theoretical commitment to understanding; how should one, finally, insert the "data" so preserved in a descriptive frame that *presents* the viewer with an interpretive framework?

Still, it is the transfer onto a different medium that constitutes the PRIVILEGED VENUE through which "data" are "published." Typically, an archaeological report is conceived as the publication of the excavator's understanding of a site, with the inclusion of the "data" that support that understanding. No matter how vast the repertory of data, it is not in principle a publication of the totality of the observations made. In Part IV I will develop the theoretical base as to why such a publication can only be digital – not so much in a technical sense (an electronic platform), but rather as a matter of method: a publication that is truly born digital proposes a wholly different approach to developing an argument, from its conception to its final presentation. While the *Urkesh Global Record* will serve as the case study that documents the realization of these goals, this book will lay out in full detail the theoretical reasoning that lies behind it.

In Part V, at the end of the "long argument" developed in the book, we go back to the starting point, namely a consideration of how it all adds up to a *Critique*, understood in the sense of a foundational assessment of the means of knowing and the "what" that can in fact be known. What is "archaeological reason"? Reflecting back on the paradox of the nature of the "data-not-given," of the "phenomena" that do not manifest themselves; and, at the same time, of the validity of "declaring" data as the "thing-in-itself" that we are after, I will highlight the philosophical dimension of the approach. This takes us further into the basic question of how we can ultimately claim to attribute meaning to a broken tradition, and, on that basis, how archaeology can more deeply impact the very core of modern thought, particularly with regard to hermeneutics.

My "long argument" (12.4.1) is multi-layered, and as a result there are many links across the boundaries of the internal subdivisions. It is in the nature of things, therefore, that the same concept may be viewed differently, depending on the particular frame of reference within which it is proposed. Both the internal cross-references and the detailed topical Index

at the end will hopefully help in maintaining that sense of unity that has remained a central concern of mine in developing the argument itself.

1.3 The Companion Website

I have detached from the limits of the book the supporting evidence typically given by footnotes and bibliography, and I have placed it instead in a separate, extensive website (www.critique-of-Ar.net). The reasons for this choice are not only due to space constraints, but, more importantly, to considerations regarding the nature of the digital argument (12.6.7). The website is articulated in a fluid manner: a large amount of information, and an equally large amount of interpretive sections, blend in a number of different ways, in the manner of a digital discourse that is not conceivable in a paper publication.

   This website will remain open and active, and will thus serve as an ongoing repository for future research. Some of the themes that are only touched upon in this book are already developed more fully in the website, and this will grow further as more research continues within the framework of the collaborative effort that has developed around this project.

1.4 The Public Impact

Archaeology provides an ideal perspective within which to see the practical impact of theory. In and of itself, an archaeological site appeals to even the most casual visitor, who is easily induced to reflect on issues that emerge naturally from the tangible nature of the evidence. The connection with underlying questions of theory arises spontaneously; more so, to be sure, than when visiting a laboratory of physics, chemistry or even medicine. It is more akin to a planetarium or a natural park, where the concrete and aesthetically appealing nature of the subject matter similarly evokes proper epistemological questions, even when not couched in philosophical terms: the "how do you know" question arises much more readily than in other sciences, where the experience of the result is more urgent than knowing how one got there.

   A visitor to an archaeological site is immediately intrigued by the process of, we might say, cultural decipherment. How do we distinguish layers; how do we date them; how we can reconstruct the function of unknown objects? All of this leads the visitors to probe the intellectual paths that have brought us to the conclusions we offer. Even when the question remains rather inarticulate in its precise formulation, there is a fundamental perception

of the basic value of theory and of how it serves as the indispensable scaffolding in our effort to attribute meaning to a remote past. In fact, it is not only the remoteness that evokes interest in visitors; it is specifically the sense of separation, that we are reaching beyond a brokenness to an experience that can no longer declare itself.

It is a fascinating moment when the most abstract touches the most concrete; when, in other words, the relevance of theory emerges in full light. Even the least educated of workmen, charged only with the removal of debris, develops at some point what we may truly call an epistemological awareness. The words "epistemology" or "critique" do not certainly have any meaning for them, but the deeper import of the concept does. Analogously, "grammar" and "hermeneutics" have no resonance as words, but the substance to which they give voice matters a great deal, to all.

While in this book I remain at the level of a theoretical archaeological reason, I am profoundly aware of its impact on the common perception of archaeology; and, indeed, profoundly committed to it. In this sense the present work may be seen as a prolegomenon to a critique of archaeological practical reason, and as the supporting theoretical statement for an archaeology that is intrinsically socially aware and socially responsible.