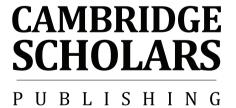# The Archaeology of Politics

The Archaeology of Politics:
The Materiality of Political Practice and Action in the Past

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
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PREFACE

The history of this volume can be traced back to many provocative conversations between the editors, and a number of graduate students and faculty at the University of Chicago during the early and middle years of the past decade. Most notable among the latter are Adam T. Smith, Kathleen Morrison, and Mark Lycett, and we thank them all for their valued insights. In October 2006, after a long day of hiking and conversation on the high mountain ridges above Howe Sound in British Columbia, we came to the idea of organizing a session for the 2008 Society for American Archaeologists' (SAA) annual meetings that would gather a series of papers from archaeologists who as their central objective sought to explore past political practice and action, in ways that engaged with contemporary anthropological theory and a close attention to data and epistemological concerns.

Among our goals for the SAA session was a questioning of what had been archaeology's central foci in political analysis in the past, in particular the theoretical emphasis on socio-evolutionary narratives, and the dual focus on large-scale institutions and societal contexts referred to as 'complex.' Our initial goals for the session were to examine if issues such as the resolution of archaeological data sets, data collection strategies, and the selection of research foci were somehow structuring the emphasis of archaeological investigations of the political in the past to this relatively narrow spectrum of issues and contexts. As such, we agreed upon the title, *Selective Foci or Fuzzy Data Resolution: Political Anthropology and the Archaeology of Political Production in the Past*, for the session and invited a group of 13 archaeologists who were working on issues of past political production in socio-historic contexts that were either small in scale, quotidian in nature, or non-institutional in context. The session was composed of papers by of Wendy Ashmore, Andrew Bauer, Nicole Boivin, Peter Johansen, Susan Kus and Victor Raharijaona, Ian Lindsay, Diane Lyons and Andrea Freeman, Laura Popova, Noah Thomas, Uzma Rizvi and Adam Smith. Papers presented in the session were remarkably cohesive as a whole and we decided to approach participants shortly after with the suggestion of expanding their papers into chapter length discussions of their research. Wendy Ashmore, Nicole Boivin, and Diane Lyons and Andrea Freeman were not able to join us in the volume but

each made very valuable contributions to the session and the intellectual spirit of the present volume. Lyons and Freemans' expanded paper from the session entitled '*I'm not evil': materializing identities of marginalized potters in Tigray region, Ethiopia*, can be found in a 2009 issue of the journal *Azania*.

As the volume began to take shape we invited several other scholars to participate and were delighted to have chapters contributed by Elizabeth Brumfiel, Steven Kosiba, and Andrew Martindale and Bryn Letham. In addition to this Eileen Murphy and Aleksandr Khokhlov joined Laura Popova to contribute Chapter 9 of the volume. We thank them all for their valued contributions. We would also like to thank Carol Koulikourdi, our editor at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for her assistance, support and patience with the volume. Thanks also to Amanda Millar at CSP for her careful assistance with the production of the volume. A number of other individuals and institutions have our gratitude and thanks.

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INTRODUCTION

RECONFIGURING THE 'POLITICAL' IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PAST POLITICAL PRODUCTION

PETER G. JOHANSEN AND ANDREW M. BAUER

Archaeology's engagement with the politics of past socio-cultural worlds is longstanding, extending to at least the first half of the 20th Century when many archaeologists grappled with understanding and reconstructing recently discovered ancient urban settlements and an ever-expanding epigraphic record that spoke of past structures and expressions of power and forms of governance. Yet despite this early interest and indeed a *degree* of theorization about particular kinds of political organization (e.g., Childe 1936, 1942, 1950), it was with the development of the 'New Archaeology' and a sustained revival of socio-evolutionary theory in American anthropology that the attention of many archaeologists became focused squarely on the subject of political organization in the past. The engagement of archaeological research with the subject of politics from the 1960's onwards was primarily concerned with the recognition of ethnographically derived stage-types of political organization (e.g., Fried 1967; Service 1962) from patterned archaeological data and the explanation of the causal mechanisms of their *evolution* from simpler to more complex forms (e.g., Adams 1966; Carneiro 1970; Claessen and Skalnik 1978; Flannery 1972; A. Johnson and Earle 1987; G. Johnston 1982; Sanders et al. 1979; Wright 1970; Wright and Johnston 1974). A critical development of this scholarship was the understanding of political forms as organizational systems that articulated people and resources within wider socio-material, cultural, and ecological framings. Yet despite the benefits of a renewed attention to explanation, this scholarship was constrained by a rigid adherence to both formal models and structural-functionalist logics. Particular emphasis was placed on categorizing, classifying (and reclassifying) those large-scale forms deemed most

socially and politically complex (i.e., chiefdoms and states), largely to the exclusion of those considered less complex or smaller in scale.

During the 1980s and 90s there began a more concentrated effort to understand the operation of power, authority, and resistance in specific and strategic articulations of economic resources, ideational constructions, and ideological contexts of very particular past socio-cultural loci (e.g., see volumes by Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Brumfiel and Fox 1994; Earle 1991, Earle 1997; Price and Feinman 1995; Parker-Pearson and Richards 1994; Schortman and Urban 1992). The practice theories of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979, 1984) engendered significant interest among archaeologists in agency, and even the relationship between structure and agency through practice, particularly among practices set within political contexts (e.g., Ashmore 1989; Bell 1992; Dietler 1998; 2001; Clark and Blake 1992; Dobres 2000; Dobres and Robb 2000; Hastorf 1993; Hendon 1996; Hodder 1991; Joyce 2000; Joyce and Winter 1996; Pauketat 2000, 2001; Shanks and Tilley 1987). These developments, together with those of a recently revitalized political anthropology (see Spencer 2007) have led to recognition among a growing body of archaeologists of the importance of socio-historical context in the development of political institutions and forms, and also to a recalibration of analytic optics away from uniformitarian types and forms of political organization to a focus on culturally-inflected, historically situated, political practice and production (Bauer et al. 2007; R. Bauer 2007; Dietler 1998, 2001; Johansen 2008; Kus and Raharijaona 1998; 2000; Lycett 2001; Morrison 2008; Morrison and Lycett 1994; Pauketat 2007; Sinopoli 2003; Smith 1999; 2003; Stahl 2004; this volume).

We begin the Introduction to this volume with a short examination of politics and archaeology (cf. Smith 2011). Specifically we ask what it is that constitutes politics, its social and cultural location, its materiality and sociology, and especially its position and possibilities as a conceptual category in archaeological analyses of past socio-cultural worlds. We hope this discussion will contextualize some of the diversity of new positions and approaches provided by the chapters that follow. In the end, we determine that politics could be more productively viewed as a fluid and dynamic field of social relations where navigation, negotiation, consensus, and contestation over the production of a web of social differences and affiliations unfold. Our primary goals for the volume are thus twofold: the problematization and re-conceptualization of politics from its understanding as a reified essence or structure of political forms (e.g., a state, a chiefdom, a stratified or egalitarian society) to that of a fluid, dynamic and culturally inflected set of practices; and, second, to consider politics' entanglement

with the materiality of socio-cultural worlds at multiple-scales through the demonstration of innovative analytical approaches to the material record. As such we outline some new and hopeful dimensions and directions of an exciting and dynamic topical and analytic field for current and future archaeological research.

Problematizing the Analysis of Politics in the Past

For decades archaeological analyses of politics have been focused on larger-scale institutional structures and contexts, particularly those of past 'complex' polities to the near exclusion of both societies with less technocratically sophisticated governing institutions and non-institutional settings within larger polities. This appears to have been part of a larger tendency in the social sciences to focus analytic attention on structures rather than the practices and social relations that are constituent of these structures and crucial for understanding change and continuity (Sahlins 1985: xi). In much of the archaeological literature this has led to the use of typological distinctions where politics has become a reified essence of very particular kinds of political formations (e.g., bands, tribes, chiefdoms, states) rather than historically constituted relations between peoples, places and things (cf. Inden 1990). Despite the considerable amount of productive scholarship on institutional forms and scales, the result has been a general neglect of investigations of political practice in other social frames, scales and contexts (e.g., gender relations, families, occupations, village communities, landscape production[1]). Does this focus in archaeology on the politics of large-scale, institutional contexts result from a particular understanding of what does or does not constitute politics? Is there something inherently more political about the institutional practice of social relations in states than in non-state or non-governmental aggregate social settings? Or is the nature of most archaeological data simply such that the examination of politics at multiple scales and sites is a more vexing analytic proposition? Regardless of how we answer these questions, our understandings of political practice and action in the past beyond broad and formal institutional contexts remains, for the most part, less well-developed.

Especially neglected are the political practices of everyday life—the pursuit of common social goals by people at a variety of scales, contexts and positions relative to the historical dynamics of power, authority and legitimacy. How then, as archaeologists, can we move beyond a notion of politics as simply an essence of some institutional structure (e.g., the state) towards an understanding of politics as a diversity of action and practice

orienting social relations towards general and particular kinds of social goals? The solution we feel lies in part in circumventing what Jonathon Spencer (2007:5) has recently called "the parochialism and formalism that has so disfigured the academic understanding of the political." This will require us to probe, perhaps with some discomfort, what it is at the heart of our conceptualization and mobilization of politics as a category of sociological, historical and indeed, anthropological analysis.

At issue here are a number of ontological tensions between what we consider constitutes politics, political activity, and the subject of political analysis. Tensions such as those between instrumentalist and expressivist understandings of politics, between private and public institutional domains, and the curious analytical divide between structure (e.g., forms) and agency, or structure and practice (Bourdieu 1977; Sahlins 1985) are all manifest in many cross disciplinary forums on the subject, and worth some discussion here (cf. Soja 2010; Zizek 1999).

Despite certain formalisms that haunt political science and some political anthropology, decades of ethnographic research, which consciously documented political thought, practice and action, have underlined the culturally inflected nature of politics (Spencer 2007: 6). Cross-culturally, political thought and action navigate a spectrum of ontologies and social locations. These range from instrumental logics concerned with the mediation of power through coercive and cooperative action and structures, to the expression and performance of cooperative activities, or resistance to structures of power by a range of social actors as willing and active participants in a diversity of interdependent relationships and institutions. In the history of sociological and historical political analysis these tensions have been demonstrably difficult to recognize, let alone address. In archaeological analyses of politics the focus has been overwhelmingly on instrumental dimensions of political action, with attention to political performance or expression largely reserved to spatial proxies of political forms,[2] e.g., settlement hierarchies as representative of socio-political types of organization, or structures (e.g., temples, houses) as containers for particular kinds of institutions. However, a number of recent analyses of political action in the historic and prehistoric past are addressing a closer convergence of these dimensions of politics, particularly through the entwined analytic frames of spatial production and landscape, as well as those exploring political ecology, commensal politics, ritual economies, identity production, factionalism, and resistance (Bauer et al. 2007; Cameron and Duff 2008; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Gilchrist 1999; Kus and Raharijaona 2000; Morrison 2001; 2009; Nassaney and Abel 2000; Smith 1999; 2003; 2006; Voss 2000; 2008; Wall 2000).

The institutional setting of political action is another field of tension that needs our attention. Classical political anthropology produced in the frame of British and American structural-functionalism effectively navigated a broad range of institutional scales from public to private, yet homogenized political thought and action to a near universal instrumentalism echoed, in among other locations, the socio-evolutionism so pervasive in much post-1960's archaeology. Here not only was the cultural inflection of political action dissolved in the interest of a unifying structure and narrative of instrumental politics (and formalist economics), but also mislaid was an attention to the historical uniqueness of the social fields in which political activity was located; rather, interest was placed on a much broader universal history, or prehistory if you prefer (cf., Geertz 1980; Sahlins 1994; Spencer 2007). Perhaps then we are faced with a further ontological tension in our efforts to configure politics—one with even broader analytic and interpretational implications deeply rooted in the development of post-enlightenment historiography, that between the intellectual production of universal and local histories (cf., Ogborn 2008; Sahlins 1985; Subrahmanyam 2005; Wolf 1982). This is a subject not unfamiliar to archaeologists and socio-cultural anthropologists, though recast as the clash between evolutionary meta-narratives and the sometimes atomistic and at times relativist renderings of the past found in the accounts of historical particularists (cf. Gledhill 1989; Roseberry 1987; Shanks and Tilley 1987).

In archaeology, the pervasive legacy of socio-evolutionary approaches to the analysis of politics may indeed reflect an analytic disposition to focus almost exclusively on a particular kind or scale of institution in past societies viewed as essential to its position in an overall evolutionary scheme of politics—i.e., the "State" or "chiefdom" (Fried 1967; Johnston and Earle 1987; Service 1966; Hayden 1995).[3] Leaving aside for a moment the more serious epistemological pitfalls of producing meta-histories, this attention to the largest, or most essential, institutional context in archaeological analyses neglects other important institutional structures and practices and leaves the dynamic historical web of social relations and practice that construct, reproduce, and contest institutional structures remarkably under-pursued. Furthermore, if we put too much stock in the recognition of familiar ideal types[4] of institutions (e.g., chiefdoms, states)—generated originally by a very specific kind of comparative ethnography—in order to navigate unfamiliar data we run the risk of seeing a far greater uniformity of forms in our collective research than actually exists. An analytic focus on practices enables a clearer understanding of the uniqueness and shape of culturally inflected political

forms that political practices produce as they articulate social relations. Perhaps then, rather than compress variation into ideal types of political organization—such as bands, tribes, chiefdoms, states, etc.—apparent cross-cultural similarities in political practice could be viewed more productively as what Adam Smith (2003: 22) has termed trans-historical regularities in practice, displacing the emphasis on the operational recognition of forms and squaring our attention firmly on the practices and social relations that constitute political fields of action.

A further related problem is the neglect of political analyses of prehistoric societies deemed not to have touched the meta-historic moment of "complexity" (cf. Rowlands 1989: 32). To approach a question we posed at the beginning of this paper, we argue that human social organization without large-scale political institutions are *no*-less political than those with the most complex and large-scale institutions (cf. Bender 1989; Whitelaw 1994). While the scales, degrees and intensities of political thought and action vary across socio-cultural and historic locations, politics inhabits every dimension of our collective social lives (Gramsci 1971; Smith 2003: 11). It is therefore the social location and cultural inflection of political practice that requires the most serious analytic attention in all cases.

The poststructuralist political anthropologies which have emerged in both the ethnographic and archaeological projects of the past several decades have broadened the field of political analysis to incorporate a much wider range and scale of the social action of past and current political life. Extending the lens of analysis into the articulation of smaller scale institutional spheres and exploring patterns of resistance from within and without institutional structures has moved the focus of attention from broad and synchronic political structures or forms to that of dynamic political practice. The result has been a more careful attention to the political production and reproduction of everyday life, its culturally inflected strategic logics and performative dynamics (e.g., Inomata and Coben 2006; Smith 2011; this volume). It has brought to the center of analysis relations of power involving less visible and privileged social actors and their articulation and exclusion within wider social and institutional frames (e.g., Appadurai 1981; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Ferguson 1992; Gordillo 2004; Guha 1997; Morrison 1995, 2001; Pauketat 2000; Scott 1985; Sinopoli 2003; Wolf 1999). Still, the prudent (if glib) note of caution provided by Sahlin's (2002: 20-23) rejoinder to the ascendance of power and resistance studies in the social sciences during the 1980s and 90's is of particular salience here; in order not to dilute or indeed dissolve the analytic utility and inferential value of the study of the

political we must avoid "translating the apparently trivial into the fatefully political" (2002:23). In other words, while there is much in the social practices of everyday life that *is* political there is much in both the quotidian and non-quotidian fields of practice that is not. The archaeological challenge, then, becomes the interpretation of which socio-cultural practices and strategies constitute the domain of politics at particular times, and which are the domain of the "apparently trivial" at others.

Many recent archaeological explorations of past political practice have been influenced by a surge of post-colonial ethnographies and histories focused on studies of resistance to developing inequalities of access to resources, spaces, and institutional structures of power in historically documented societies (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Guha 1997; Scott 1985). An emergent theme in this body of work is an analytic concern with the operation of power, its modalities, and inhabitation within a range of socio-material and socio-symbolic practice in *historically* situated settings (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Gordillo 2004; Guha 1997; Morrison 2001; Sinopoli 1988, 2003; Wolf 1990; 1999). While much archaeological research has been temporally located in historic period research—especially that of modern colonialisms (e.g., Kus and Raharijaona 2000; Leone 1995; Miller 1989; Morrison 1995, 2001, 2007; Nassaney and Abel 2000; Sinopoli 2003)—a growing body of work on prehistoric periods has been exploring politics as suites of historically situated practices through which power is differentially articulated, manifested and impacted on a variety of social relationships by a diversity of social actors in the conscious pursuit of particular individual and collective goals (Bauer et al. 2007; Brumfiel 1994a; 1994b; Cameron and Duff 2008; Dietler 1998, 2001; Dietler and Herbich 2001; Johansen 2008; Morrison 2009; Pauketat 2000; Smith 1999, 2003, 2006). This work has demonstrated how the materiality of social life was engaged in historically contingent, culturally inflected political practices which strategically ordered, mediated and expressed social relations through a diversity of aggregations and distinctions. This suggests an answer to another question we posed earlier: that patterned archaeological data is in fact rather well suited to the analysis of political practices at a variety of scales and sites.

Building on this scholarship we suggest that the recognition of the political from the "trivial" can be evaluated by engaging a concept rather familiar to archaeologists: *context*. In the cases presented in this volume there is acute attention to the cultural, social, and historical contexts that constitutes some actions and activities as political, and others not. For example, Bauer's analysis of Iron Age landscape production in South India

(Chapter 3), argues that the construction of commemorative megalithic monuments and other seemingly mundane features, such as rock pools for the purposes of watering grazing animals, constituted political practices of spatial appropriation largely because, as an ensemble of related activities, they contributed to the production of places characterized by social inequalities of access both to the places themselves and to the capacity to reconstitute the material and symbolic resources associated with herd management, provisioning communal feasts, and ultimately mobilizing labor. His interpretation of the *political* relevance of the creation of these commemorative places would have been much different if there was not well-attested evidence for the economic and symbolic importance of cattle during the Iron Age.

Another good example of the critical role of socio-historic context in situating socio-material practice as decidedly political is found in Thomas' investigation of the politics of value involving minerals and pigments during the early Spanish-Puebloan colonial encounter in 16th Century New Mexico (Chapter 2). In this case it is the "structure" of the historical "conjuncture" of two unique and unfolding cultural logics of value (converged on one and the same range of minerals), that having become entangled in the political economy and ecology of colonial encounter, produced and defined (or perhaps amplified) two distinct yet convergent and overlapping fields of political logic (perception, conception, valuation) and practice (e.g., collection, assessment, usage) through conflict and negotiation over the value, procurement and exchange of mineral ores. Moreover, Brumfiel's chapter draws our attention to an important scale and context of political practice often overlooked by archaeologists as a unified socio-political (or indeed internally apolitical unit: the household (Chapter 8). Her study of variation among a (largely) common suite of design motifs on spindle whorls and serving vessels within a Mid Post-Classic household in Xaltocan, Mexico demonstrates how the practice of decoration and display were used to negotiate individual and group identities within private and public spheres of political practice, both within the household and the wider community. In this case, the display of decorative motifs on spindle whorls within the private place of individual households was a means for individuals (likely women) to negotiate their individual identities (as distinctive or convergent to that of the larger household group), while the public display of a more restricted set of motifs on serving vessels, through the commensal politics of sponsored feasts, demonstrated household identity (and unity) to the broader community. Such examples take us to the heart of the theoretical issue we

have been exploring—namely, what constitutes politics within a wider suite of social actions and practices.

Investigating the Theoretical and Sociological Location of Politics: Framing Practice, Power, Structure and Agency in Archaeological Analysis

If archaeology has largely pursued the analysis of politics in the past through a somewhat restricted set of conceptual and theoretical constructs, epistemological framings, scalar and sociological objects and optics, how then might we refocus our analytic attention on a wider suite of political thought, practice and action? Part of the answer to this question we feel lies with a redefinition or reconstitution of what it is that we mean by political, both in terms of its theoretical location and also how politics inhabits socio-historical contexts and socio-material practice. Such a reframing we hope will allow us to better explore not only those political contexts thinly pursued by archaeologists to date but also enable us to re-examine, with new eyes and inferential logics, those avenues of past politics more frequently pursued in archaeological research.

We do not wish to provide a reductive or restrictive definition of politics here; the intellectual history of political science and political anthropology serves as poignant reminders of the conceptual and analytic constraints that emerge from such efforts (Spencer 2007; Taylor 1985). Yet not to make any attempt at some, even very broad framing of the social field of politics risks its trivialization by the inclusion of all and sundry cultural phenomena as somehow political in character (Sahlins 2002). Here then we offer a framing that is somewhat flexible yet defined, but critically one that is capable of incorporating the myriad of culturally inflected political logic and practice regardless of spatio-temporal scale or socio-historic context. We view *politics* as a fluid and dynamic field of social relations where navigation, negotiation, consensus, and contestation over the production of a web of social differences and affiliations unfold. It is the social location where power is mediated through established and emergent cultural logics and social relations, where relations of power are challenged, renovated and reinvented, or the status quo of social orders are maintained. Finally, it is a field of creative and performative tensions though which ideological positions, individual and collective interests, and structures of authority, legitimacy, status and access are acted out and upon. While the mediation of power and the strategic instrumentality of agents (individuals and groups) are crucial components of the political dimension of social life, politics is neither a function of the expression of

power or of a rational self-interest[5] (Geertz 1980: 122, 135; Sahlins 2002: 20; Spencer 2007: 37). Rather, politics often proceeds along social trajectories that are decidedly non-rational, without the interest or promise of material gain, in which power operates through complex configurations of complimentary and juxtaposing modalities at times through relations and forms not immediately recognizable as such (cf., Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Miller 1989; Scott 1985; 1998; Spencer 2007; Wolf 1990).

The expression of power through a political field of social relations and practices warrants at least some brief exposition here. Miller (1989:64) draws our attention to a poorly resolved analytic tension between agency and structure located between more traditional accounts of power with their focus on instrumental control and coercion (e.g., that discussed by and derived from Weber 1947), and those of the later 20th Century (most notably Foucault 1977, 1981) in which power exists as a compelling force or principle within an underlying structure of practice and discourse. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 22) and Wolf (1990)[6] address this tension through the identification of two analytically discrete modalities of power that inhabit and inhere to culturally–inflected social relations and the materiality of political practice. The first is a structural or non-agentive mode where social thought and practice are directed, even controlled by naturalized ontologies that are deeply and historically embedded in cultural values and conventions such as ethics and aesthetics (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 22). The second is an agentive or tactical mode, which entails the purposeful exercise of control over the "actions and perceptions" of all or segments of society by certain member groups (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 22; Wolf 1990: 587). These modalities of power articulate differentially and contingently according to historical circumstance, cultural location and spatio-temporal scale. The emphasis of the latter is on instrumental and strategic logics and practices and the aspirations of agents while the former is with historically seated traditions and naturalized logics and practices. Both, however, entail performance and materiality. Yet despite the utility of their analytic separation, these modalities of power must be recognized as convergent and dialectical in producing political practices in socio-historic contexts; they do not operate independent of one another regardless of the apparent analytic pre-eminence of one over another in a given context. Understanding the convergence of these two modalities of power, in the interpretation of historical processes of political production from the archaeological record is an important and useful analytical focus.

Much work in historical anthropology has moved towards a clearer theoretical understanding of the dialectics of structure and agency through practice within a scalar recognition of time (and indeed space) (e.g., Appadurai 1981; Basso 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Gordillo 2004; Lansing 1991; Mintz 1985; Roseberry 1987; Sahlins 1985; Wolf 1991; 1999). Political practice involves the exercise of power by agents through social relations within a given structure of power, with the consequent mediation of contingent or anticipated outcomes (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:18). The resulting political sociology may be enduring or fleeting, maintaining or altering that which preceded it. However, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991: 18) note, transcending from a short to medium term temporality, emergent relations of power (of an agentive character) that once appeared contingent and fleeting, may through regularized practice, become naturalized and operate unquestioned (as tradition for a time) within localized ontologies (thus inhabiting a more structural location). But such a situation develops within its own unique articulating history of social relations, political practice and modalities and relations of power; i.e., as an historical process of political production (cf. Taylor 1985: 36).

The sociology produced by political practice and its embedded relations of power is one in which social relations of difference (and affiliation) are constructed, maintained, challenged and reproduced, social relations that are based on varying degrees of unequal access to places, people, positions, materials, and knowledge. The scale and contours of these social relations and the degree and intensity of socio-material inequalities differ considerably in conception and practice from rigid social hierarchies to flexible and even permeable distinctions. Political economy with its focus on social differences and the potential for uneven distributions of, and access to, social, material and symbolic resources generated by productive activity has been an important location of study for the analysis of the sociological context of political practice in archaeology and historical anthropology.

Yet, political economy's materialist framing has been critiqued on a number of levels as placing either too strong an emphasis on, or granting a determinative role to, economic relations in its conception of political structure (and what we understand here as political practice and production) (cf. Martindale Chapter 10 Roseberry 1987; Rowlands 2004, 2005; Smith 2011). Among the consequences of particular shades of materialism on the framing of politics' sociological location are a lack of attention to the role of symbolic resources, ideational constructs such as meaning, the materiality of social life (see below), and the historically

constituted nature of political production[7] (Roseberry 1987; Rowlands 2004). While in many cases much of this critique is justified, recent research is replete with examples of efforts to retool political economy paradigms to mitigate these very concerns (e.g., Bauer et al. 2007; Bauer Chapter 3; Johansen 2008, Chapter 6; Kosiba Chapter 4; Martindale and Letham Chapter 10; Roseberry 1987; Rowlands 2004, 2005; Stahl 2004). Here we argue for an inferential logic to the analysis of past political practice that begins with a recognition of the historical operation of structural and agentive modalities of power in political practice that produce sociological contexts and social relations of difference, one that acknowledges both a materialism and materiality in the politics of social life. It is from such a position that we may begin to analyze and assess many of those issues and contexts of political practice more common to archaeology and social science (e.g., authority, legitimacy, conflict, resistance, institutions, structures, agents, identity, gender, class) and those less commonly addressed (e.g., evaluation, consensus, cohesion, altruism; agonism, daily life, families, occupations, non-institutional settings). As it is with the archaeological vestiges of the materiality of political practice that our greatest potential for inference building and interpretation as archaeologists and historical anthropologists lies, we turn now to a discussion of the deep entanglement of political action within the materiality of socio-cultural worlds.

The Materiality of Political Practice

Politics, as a specific and dynamic field of power, social relations and practices, both produces and is constrained by a materiality. There are (at least) two distinct, emphases on "materiality" circulating among archaeologists and socio-cultural anthropologists today. Some scholars call attention to the degree to which objects and things are actively imbued with meaning and come to embody and encode important values through their production and circulation within historical cultural contexts, while at the same time recursively shaping human experience, subjectivities, and society (cf. Boivin 2008; Demarrais et al. 2004; Miller 2005; Meskell 2005a). Meskell (2005b), comes the closest to a definitional stance on this position:

> Materiality represents a presence of power in realizing the world, crafting things from nothing, subjects from nonsubjects. This affecting presence is shaped through enactment with the physical world, projecting or imprinting ourselves onto the world [Armstrong 1981: 19]. Such originary crafting acknowledges that there are no a priori objects. They can never be simply

inferred as axiomatic; rather, they must be sensed, experienced, and believed [Simmel 1979: 61]. Reciprocally it is this same material world with which human beings are constituted as cultural agents.

(Meskell 2005b: 51-52).

Other scholars have placed emphasis on the dynamic relational attributes of physical materials to resist particular kinds of cultural imprints, uses, and projections, and instead highlight the degree to which the material world contributes to the generative process of constituting things, histories, and meanings through socio-material articulations. Tim Ingold, for example, takes a different position on the histories of things, arguing against the suggestion that we simply "project" or "imprint" "ourselves on the [physical] world." His emphasis is placed provocatively on properties of the materials themselves arguing that they "are not fixed attributes of matter but are processual and relational." They, too, are historical—changing according to the mediums through which they are experienced or according to temporary conditions such as being hot or cold, wet or dry, rooted in the ground or floating in water. Consequently, they always have dynamic potential and are not only capable of resisting preexisting kinds of (cultural) "imprints" or "projections," but in fact contribute to the generative process of constituting meaning through socio-material practice (see also Boivin 2008: 26). Ingold suggests that "making" inanimate things is a process of "growth"—much like raising crops or animals—not a processes of producing something out of an infinitely malleable material substrate. Material forms are generated—like the forms of living beings—within the relational contexts of the mutual involvement of people and their environments" (Ingold 2000: 88, see also Ingold 2000: 339-348). In a similar vein Nicole Boivin argues, in definitional terms, that materiality:

emphasize[s] the physicality of the material world—the fact that it has dimensions, that it resists and constrains, and that it offers possibilities for the human agent (or organism) by virtue of its set of physical properties.

(Boivin 2008: 26)

Between the definition provided by Meskell and the orientation toward materials advocated by Ingold we see different framings of what "materiality" should or could mean. In the case of the first, the emphasis is placed on the power of meaningfully imbued objects to do work in a social field; "[m]ateriality is thus a set of cultural relationships [Pels 2002]. Imbued matter and embodied objects exist in relationship to specificities of temporality, spatiality, and sociality" (Meskell 2005a: 6). In the second

case, emphasis is placed on the properties of environmental constituents to actively inform, resist, enable, and constrain their "growth," uses, and circulations among people through a dynamic process of practice and engagement: "The properties of materials, in short, are not attributes but histories (Ingold 2007: 15)." Despite the (at times contentious) debate spawned by Ingold's concern for *materials against materialities* we hasten to add, perhaps too quickly, that the emphases are not mutually exclusive. Ingold's protests stem largely from a concern for the generation of meaning and form; he opposes the idea that human actors simply impose meaning and form on materials entirely as they choose and please, with no regard for the activities and dynamic properties of plants, animals, and things that are interactive in the process of their fashioning. Such a framing tends towards the reproduction of an ontological dualism between the intentional worlds of humans and unintentional worlds of other things-plants-and-animals, subjects and objects, or *culture* and *nature*, that a considerable degree of postmodern scholarship has rather effectively challenged (e.g., Descola and Pálsson 1996). Yet, much of the materiality literature, including that of Meskell's cited above, is likewise attempting to dissolve the boundary between *a priori* subjects and objects (see, for example, Miller's [2005] discussion of 'objectification') through the process of their "mutual constitution." Regardless of where their meanings originate and the dynamic relationships through which things become things (and subjects become subjects), things *do* come to have meanings to people, meanings that may have a degree of permanence or that may change through their (re)fashioning, consumption, uses, and circulations. Meanings may also change as their material properties move through their own histories (e.g., as rocks weather, slopes erode, wood cracks etc.) interactively within a field of other constituent actors in socio-historic contexts. In other words, things do participate in the social and cultural fields that Meskell and others attribute to them (see also Knappett 2007).

Many of the case studies in this book demonstrate that *materiality matters*, in either framing of the term discussed above. Social relationships and political practices are constituted not only through a symbolic field, but also a material one—complete with nonhuman constituents that take on and inform important meanings and attributes within the context of localized and historically constituted cultural logics and practice. This materiality actively inhabits socio-cultural worlds through political practices, recursively producing (and *re*producing) social relations, individual and group subjectivities, and sociological contexts; it holds the potential for further anticipated or contingent consequences of both meaning and practice (cf. Keene 2005). As such, and in keeping with a

more general theoretic of materiality, the optics of analysis for a political materiality cannot be subsumed in a set of relationships entailing the simple reflection of political forms or meanings in material objects (see Miller 2005); this kind of reductionist analytic strategy has characterized much archaeological research on politics such as the employment of settlement hierarchies as proxies for socio-evolutionary stage types (e.g., Johnston and Earle 1987). Rather here we advocate the recognition of political materiality as a "mutually constituted"[8] process that embodies and empowers both people and objects[9] through culturally inflected political practices that produce distinctive political sociologies and socio-material worlds.

The dialectical relationships between people and things, humans and nonhumans, are inextricably bound together by historic and emergent relations of production. Yet understanding the dynamic (re)productive character of political materiality requires us to revisit the dialectical articulation of structural and agentive modalities of power discussed in the previous section. As such, we are exploring both a dialectics of objectification between people (individuals and groups) and objects (Miller 1987; 2005; cf., Ingold 2000; Lemonnier 1992; Rowlands 2004) and a dialectics of power, between agentive and structural modalities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), which coalesce in the action of political practice, making and remaking both people and things (cf., Rowlands 2004). Agentive and structural modalities of power actively inhabit objects/ artifacts such as buildings, landscapes (and aspects thereof that are physically constructed or socio-culturally conceived), tools, weapons, regalia, food and drink (to name a few) through practice within historical, contextual conjunctures at a multitude of scales (spatio-temporal, behavioral), effecting change or stability with anticipated or contingent consequences.

The naturalization of power relations, in people, positions or objects and the relationships between particular objects and people may begin as the contingent effects of very particular circumstances but their historical origins may cease over time to be recognized, yielding agency to other sources in embedded cultural logics (e.g., supernatural, natural or socio-cultural). The displacement of emphasis from an agentive to structural modality of power can result in objects assuming a more agentive role in culturally-inflected power relations whereby certain forms (e.g., buildings, monuments, landforms, insignia) are imbued with the unquestioned (or little questioned) power of convention with attendant status, value and meaning (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Fernandez 1977; Foucault 1977; Kus and Raharijaona 1998, 2000; Lansing 1991; Latour 2005;

Markus 1993; H. Moore 1986; J. Moore 1996; Smith and David 1995). As Miller (2005: 32) reminds us, "[s]ocial relations exist in and through our material worlds that often act in entirely unexpected ways that cannot be traced back to some clear sense of will or intention" (see also Latour 2004). This ensuing and resultant political materiality is an intrinsic part of a political sociology of practice as many of the papers in this volume demonstrate—a materiality that is identified through the patterned remains of archaeological landscapes. Thomas' discussion of the historical conjuncture of color and mineral valuations between Spanish and Puebloan peoples during the early colonial period in New Mexico (Chapter 2), Johansen's Iron Age South Indian architectural practices of residential separation (Chapter 6), and Rizvi's spatial aesthetics of Indus toiletry and civic sanitation practices (Chapter 7), all speak to a political materiality and sociology located within deeply embedded, naturalized ontologies of power. Yet we cannot loose sight of the fact that very real human agents produced these materialities and sociologies through political thought practice, and action.

This leads us towards contexts of political materiality where the agentive modality of power appears more pre-eminent in political practice. Political materiality is no less active in contexts of political practice where human social agents employ instrumental and strategic logics to achieve political goals. Of course social actors, be they individuals or groups, must navigate local, historically established structures of power when practicing politics and this entails the strategic manipulation of material relationships and forms. This can manifest itself in multiple ways, where individuals and groups control, appropriate or manipulate the meaning or physical presence of things in order to maintain or effect change on their sociological contexts at multiple, and at times convergent, scales of practice.

Several Chapters in the volume discuss examples of this shade of political materiality. Bauer's examination of the politics of landscape production during the South Indian Iron Age underlines the role of an agentive modality of power expressed in practices such as feasting and ritual commemoration that reauthorized social relations and relations to redefined places, all within the contexts of well-established structures of power (Chapter 3). Kosiba' analysis emphasizes the role of mortuary practices and commensalism as elements of agentive strategies for creating localities of political autonomy during Late Intermediate Period in the Cusco region of Peru (Chapter 4). Lindsay's chapter investigates how emergent Late Bronze Age political elites, building upon an earlier tradition of martial leadership, amplified and institutionalized established social inequalities by renovating the *Middle Bronze Age* regional