

Presentation

ARCHAEOLOGY AND PATRIMONY. DEBATE AT A CROSSROADS

This issue of *Relaciones Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* appears at a particularly delicate juncture regarding cultural policies, especially in Mexico, where the government recently constituted a Department of Culture (*Secretaría de Cultura*), inaugurated by presidential decree in December 2015. However, the regulations that would govern its internal functioning—which were supposed to have been published in April of this year—are still inexistent at the time of writing (early September, 2016). These circumstances have sparked an ongoing debate in the media, but beyond this type of discussion there is another that must be taken up again; namely, the high probability that these changes in the institutional structures entrusted with cultural matters will affect, to some degree, how the nation's patrimony is managed and the policies for salvaging, studying and conserving it in the short, medium and long terms. Although we do find ourselves at this crossroads, the issues that are analyzed in the articles included in our *Thematic Section* are not thought from the current situation in Mexico but, rather, from the experience of the many years of research in the country that have generated proposals which may well be able to be extended to realities far beyond Mexico's national borders.

A few months back, a member of this journal's Editorial Council, Dr. Agapi Filini, invited a group of archaeologists to expound their reflections on the relations among archaeological work, practices related to the salvaging and conservation of patrimony, and the policies that govern them. The results are the four particularly thought-provoking texts that allow us to test the temperature of a long history of encounters and dis-encounters between the academic practice of archaeology and the policies designed to regulate the nation's archaeological patrimony. Efraín Cárdenas presents a summary account of a series of projects that have confronted, precisely, the problem of how to resolve dissensions between academics and politics. In his article, Cárdenas introduces two key concepts for understanding his proposal –based on many years of experience– for the optimal way to administer Mexico's archaeological patrimony: *bio-cultural archaeology* and *co-responsibility*. Conserving and protecting a nation's archaeological patrimony is impossible if the natural environment is not conscientiously conserved and protected as well, and neither one of these goals is feasible in the absence of co-responsibility, which must exist not only between academic archaeology and governmental policy, but also include the wider society. In his contribution, Héctor Carmona Machado elucidates how the phenomenon of the creation of patrimony as a function of the discursive needs of the present comes into existence. He writes of identity, but also presents a discourse on the exercise of power as a constitutive characteristic of what patrimony is, and what it is not. Moreover, these discursive needs –in Mexico and other countries– tend to be defined by agencies that are external to the discourse of archaeology as a discipline devoted to the generation of knowledge.

David Arturo Muñoz García presents a simple but precise review of a phenomenon upon which historians and anthropologists have reflected long and hard in our practices, but one to which, it seems, archaeologists have paid little heed: the weight of narrative. This refers to the ways in which we recount events in historiography, or how we find ourselves suddenly immersed in the daily life or ritual practices of a community through a well-written ethnography or excellent notes based on participant observation. These approaches often

define the narrative style that a discipline adopts, following that of certain authors who come to be considered “model” exponents of discourse in a particular field. Muñoz examines the case of the narratives written by Phil Weigand, reminding us that he is an iconic author in the archaeology of Western Mexico. Finally, Luis Alberto López Wario takes up the issue of the dis-encounters that emerge between academic proposals for the conservation of archaeological patrimony and the political demands of Mexico’s six-year presidential administrations, which fracture the proposal of co-responsibility expounded by Cárdenas at the beginning of this section. The *Thematic Section* closes with a text by Delia del Consuelo Domínguez Cuanalo and Virginia Cabrera Becerra who, from the perspective of social anthropology –a discipline distinct from archaeology though intimately related to it– present an account of how a community in the state of Puebla has employed its traditional *cargo* system to take responsibility (in its view, and by establishing its own rules) for conserving its architectural patrimony; in this case, the San Bernardino Tlaxcalancingo Church. Their text offers additional elements for reflecting more deeply on the co-responsibility of different sectors in protecting patrimony.

As a compliment to the section *Archaeology and patrimony...* we include in our “Notes and Debates” the translation of the now classic archaeological text by Michael Shanks and Randall H. McGuire entitled “The Craft of Archaeology”.¹ Though first published some twenty years ago, its inclusion in relation to our *Thematic Section* is logical, indeed, since certain issues raised there regarding theory and practice in archaeology are still current in debates over the role of archaeology in relation to the analysis and conservation of patrimony.

Carlos Herrejón translates and presents a fascinating document on the “Visit to the thresholds” (*Visita ad limina*, or *Visita a los umbrales*) of the Bishopric of Michoacán, written in Latin by Clemente de Jesús Munguía in 1862. The original text is held in the Vatican’s Secret Ar-

¹ “The Craft of Archaeology”, originally appeared in *American Antiquity*, 61(1) (January 1996): 75-88. This translation is by Agapi Filini. We thank Randall H. McGuire for generously authorizing the publication of the translation of his article in our journal.

chives and went unpublished until today. It contains information heretofore unknown concerning the state of this Bishopric in the mid-19th century, and so is a document that will enrich historiography on this tense period in the relations between Church and State in Mexico.

On this occasion, our *General Section* consists of three articles. In the first, Jessica Ramírez Méndez examines a key moment in the history of the foundation of the Barefoot Carmelites (*carmelitas descalzos*) of the Holy Desert of Cuajimalpa. The years from 1602-to-1606 brought a fundamental change in this Order's orientation, as it ceased to be an institution devoted to preparing young men for mission life in northern New Spain, opting for a path of prayer and contemplation. The second essay, penned by José Manuel Florez López, analyzes the process through which a Zoque-Popoluca community in the state of Veracruz adopted cattle-raising as its principle activity in the decade of 1980. The author elucidates both the causes that provoked this change and its impact, not only on the totality of economic activities performed by the inhabitants, but also on the region's landscape. This section ends with a text by José Luis Escalona Victoria that reflects the deep theoretical analysis characteristic of his writings, in this case an exploration of the problem of the over-fetishization of artisanal production (or *ethnomerchandise*, as he calls it).

Finally, our readers will have noted the radical transformation of the cover design of this issue of *Relaciones*, which had undergone only slight modifications since issue no. 69 (winter 1997). These necessary changes reflect a series of practical measures that we have had to implement in order to advance in the process of transforming our journal into a genuinely digital, on-line publication; a project undertaken from the beginning of this administration that will be completed in a few months. The result of this process is that, in 2017, we will offer contents with additional characteristics regarding open access, legibility and impact at the international level. Sincere thanks to all of you for accompanying us on this voyage.

Victor Gayol

*English translation of the Presentation and Abstracts
by Paul C. Kersey Johnson*