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**Review of:**

**Chapman, J and Gaydarska, B. 2007. *Parts and Wholes: Fragmentation in Prehistoric Context*. Oxford: Oxbow. 264 Pages. ISBN 1842172220. Paperback £30.**

**Introduction**

For a decade now the Durham-University-based archaeologist John Chapman has been successfully delivering on a quiet revolution in archaeology as a consequence of a deceptively simple but eloquent premise: that the archaeological record is largely *not* made up of the rubbish of past societies. Instead, materials recovered from the ground in the processes of excavation are more often than not the consequence of meaningful practices (structured deposition), the broken state of these materials is likely to be the product of purposeful action (fragmentation) and their often incomplete state relates to a suite of socially enduring and reciprocal relationships (enchainment).

The original development of Chapman's premise (1996, 2000) relied heavily upon the particularities of the material culture of later Balkan prehistory: figurines and ceramics, houses and tell settlements, single inhumations and cemeteries, and early metalwork and hoards. All of these were successfully framed within a single narrative of structured deposition and fragmentation, and of the evolving tension between the processes of enchainment and accumulation (the grouping of objects together) during the Neolithic and Copper Age as the articulation of particular types of individual and social identities and relationships.

A comparison with Thomas (1996) and Chapman (2000) is not unwarranted, as both articulate the importance of the manipulation of material culture as the primary (and by definition unavoidable) component in the formation and maintenance of culturally specific, and spatially and temporally distinct, modes of personhood. Whereas *Time, Culture and Identity* contains an indulgence of theoretical abstraction and a compartmentalisation of theory and case studies, *Fragmentation in Archaeology* is burdened with a lack of generalisation and an abundance of specific material. Consequently, whilst there was much of interest for researchers working in later European prehistory, there appeared to be little of interest to other specialists in Chapman's original thesis. *Parts and Wholes* is therefore clearly an attempt by Chapman, this time in association with Bisserka Gaydarska, a fellow researcher in Balkan prehistory, to reach a much wider audience, and this is evident in the structure of the book. Whilst *Fragmentation in Archaeology* had a largely cohesive thematic and chronological narrative but one concerned exclusively with the minutiae of Balkan prehistory, *Part and Wholes* is a much more fragmented but generalised affair, and is consequently far more accessible. *Parts and Wholes* consists of nine chapters: five quite general chapters concerned with

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developing arguments central to the fragmentation premise and which also make substantial reference to other works that have utilised this premise in some way, and four chapters which are again devoted to extended case studies from the Balkan Neolithic and Copper Age.

Rather than describe sequentially the various dimensions and arguments presented in each chapter, I want to instead address the relevance and implication of the premise of purposeful fragmentation to wider debates and themes in archaeology: the first of these being the topic of materiality and material culture, which will lead into the second theme, the various archaeological fields of practice.

### **Materiality and Material Culture**

The general thesis of fragmentation constitutes a powerful and refreshing contribution to material culture studies, and in particular to interpretative archaeology where the emphasis has been largely upon the social and symbolic capital (e.g. Shanks and Tilley 1982; Hodder 1982) or experience (Tilley 1994, 2004) of whole, complete and finished material projects: a fetish-concern established and maintained in archaeological inquiry since 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century antiquarianism. The study of fragmentation and other parallel concerns with the subject of personhood (e.g. Brück 1999; Fowler 2004) have instead suggested worlds of fluid categories of people, animals and artefacts that subvert our modern understandings of these things as distinct, individual and physically bounded entities.

The critique of this modern position of ‘wholeness’ underpins the entire narrative of *Parts and Wholes*, and certainly in a far more explicit way than was taken by Chapman in his original thesis. It is, however, an inconsistent narrative and one that oscillates frequently between a symmetrical and democratic (cf. Olsen 2003) role for parts (Chapter 3) and a re-reification of the whole (Chapter 2), asserting “the unpalatable truth that all objects were designed and created to be whole” (p. 15). This inconsistency, which at best can be alluded to as a theoretical tension (loss of nerve?) between *a priori* whole and fragmented objects or parts, is problematic in that it helps to perpetuate and maintain the very epistemic edifice that it aims to undermine. This results in a vast ontological chasm between whole and part, establishing a distinctive symbolic and social closure of the states of particular types of material culture in general, and of the individual biographies of objects in particular, rather than positing a continuum of becoming and of equal differentiation, whereby fragmented objects are not posited as distinct or lesser in form or character to whole complete ones.

This is exemplified by the lack of any thorough discussion of the social and symbolic processes of manufacture and is a serious omission from the emphasis Chapman and Gaydarska place upon the biographical approach: it is a stage in an artefact’s lifecycle that would have contributed directly to its form and function and may well have contributed to how and when an object was, if ever, to have been fragmented, enchained or accumulated. For example, the selection of certain materials and substances can be argued to have been highly social and purposeful (Lemonnier 1992) as part of the pro-

cess of object manufacture and therein rendering any ‘whole’ a composition of differentially meaningful parts (cf. Matthews 2008; Thomas 1999): therefore their subsequent fragmentation into their original or new constituent parts need not be differentiated so exclusively or hierarchically as Chapman and Gaydarska imply. This artificial closure of the processes of manufacture (composition) from that of use (wholeness) and disposal (fragmentation, enchainment and deposition) is represented by the structure of the book.

Chapman (2000: 99) suggests that with the development of copper objects, acts of deliberate fragmentation would have decreased due to the difficulties inherent in breaking metalwork compared to ceramic or organic materials, thus encouraging different processes of enchainment, through accumulation, during the Balkan Copper Age. However, an appreciation of the properties and processes involved in the manufacture of metalwork implies that it would have easily facilitated practices of fragmentation, suggesting that rather than metalwork representing a contraction of acts of fragmentation, it was *knowledge* concerning acts of fragmentation that become restricted, possibly amongst the very craftsmen that produced such materials (cf. Quilliec 2007). The biographical connections and roles of objects - be it through manufacture or use or disposal, whole or part - are inextricably linked rather than exclusive domains of closure. Moreover, the landscape element of spatiality linked to the dispersal of fragmented artefacts through enchainment (pp. 106-111) can and should also be extended to landscape relationships concerning the different types of substances used to create objects, natural and organic substances creating composite artefacts: from particles to wholes to fragments.

### **Fields of Practice**

The great strength of both *Fragmentation in Archaeology* and *Parts and Wholes* is that they allude directly to the materials of the conceptual model they employ rather than standing as mere theoretical abstraction. However, one might question whether Chapman’s discussion of the ‘rubbish’ premise and of structured deposition really does go far enough, for whilst it questions key assumptions and the application of such models to the archaeological record, it doesn’t question the epistemological *basis* of that record. By that I mean the way that materials are identified, assembled and catalogued, and the constraining properties of the dissemination of these processes. After all, the categorisation process is one of constraint and closure, creating certain intelligible possibilities whilst always excluding others by way of their alien nature (cf. Barrett 1994: 70-71).

Consequently, in order to gain the necessary information regarding fragmentation and enchainment Chapman and Gaydarska are proponents of ‘total excavation’ which in many circumstances is simply not a viable practical solution to the question of fragmentation. Materials not recovered under such conditions must still be found a role and whereas Chapman’s first thesis demonstrated the possibilities of working with what may be a partial record, for example using the objects catalogued in the *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* series (Chapman 2000: 99-104), *Parts and Wholes* sets down a different agenda. It is clearly a manifesto, and one aimed at shaping the future of both recovery and interpretation.

Through discussions of structured deposition, deliberate fragmentation, accumulation and enchainment the notion of the archaeological record as a record of 'rubbish' is questioned but it is not deconstructed, and the question of 'why' we believe such things to be rubbish in the first place is not addressed. This is a great shame as it would have contributed significantly to the recent lapse in debates surrounding the nature of the archaeological record. Similarly, a discussion of the obsession amongst Western and industrialised societies with wholeness and completeness and the purity of the new as a fundamental part of how a certain section of the world now regards objects and their relations with them is perhaps warranted (cf. Douglas 2002). Many other communities have entirely different views on things: on breaking, repairing and recycling (see Fowler 2004 for a discussion of anthropology's role in this field). That Chapman has brought to light such an important theme is to be applauded, for such practices and circumstances are highly relevant to our theoretical positions as they are concerned with fieldwork, for as much as such models allow us to overcome the intellectual burden of modernity (cf. Thomas 2004), they also provide powerful tools to both reflect and critique our own contingent inhabitation in the world.

Consequently, these conceptual tools, of which the fragmentation premise is but one, offer a significant challenge to contemporary museum design and the strategies of curatorial staff and collecting. The modernisation of displays and curation have moved further toward the stylistic conception of art galleries, increasing processes of de-contextualisation: an ever-present spectre is that of the display of only whole or complete artefacts and of the finest, most unworn examples, whilst the broken and worn remain stored and archived. Curatorial strategy needs to return to the site report if it is to demonstrate a truly critical appreciation of the construction of authenticity. For example, whilst the restoration of ethnographic materials is often considered unthinkable, employing instead a strategy of conservation, archaeological materials often undergo repair and reconstruction to a state of completeness so as to render them acceptable and intelligible to modern sensibilities. One can only wonder at the conceptual challenge that a display of fragmented pottery, bone or metal pieces might offer in light of the speed at which modern material culture is disposed of in contemporary Western industrialised society. Its relevance extends far beyond archaeological theory or interpretation. Museum Studies scholars and curators could well do with heeding the arguments and premise laid down in this book. Chapman's thesis presents a devastating condemnation of such a false representation of an object that may never have been intended to remain whole, been valued as a whole object, and was most likely never deposited and interred whole to begin with. This is a cogent and sobering position for a subdiscipline whose practitioners, archaeologists and curators alike, are increasingly inclined toward the aesthetic quality of contemporary art galleries and object-appreciation rather than curatorial practice as social and political debate through the critical (and political) deployment of a past both unfamiliar and challenging.

### **Conclusion**

With the development of greater specialisation and a consequential fragmentation of archaeology's knowledge base, the revival and recapitulation of debates surrounding

topics such as structured deposition, taphonomic processes and the nature of the archaeological record is most welcome. Reading *Parts and Wholes* provides a most excellent adventure in epistemological debates in contemporary archaeological theory and practice. Sequels are more often than not haphazard affairs, for example *The Materiality of Stone* (2004) as the successor to Tilley's *A Phenomenology of Landscape* is arguably disappointing and clearly fails to build on or acknowledge works directly outside of the author's own oeuvre. Chapman and Gaydarska however embrace the works of others and address self-acknowledged mistakes and the criticism levelled by others. In contrast to Binford's (1988: 875) review of Hodder's (1986) *Reading the Past*, Chapman and Gaydarska's *Parts and Wholes* is a big book with a big message and we should all make a little more noise about it this time around, as others are already beginning to do (Gamble 2007).

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