

Asociația Română de Arheologie
Studii de Preistorie
Supplementum 4 / 2016

Douglass W. Bailey

**Archaeology today: discussions
of themes, goals, and methods**

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Introduction

Radu-Alexandru Dragoman,
Constantin Haită

This book belongs to a genre of writing rarely encountered in archaeological literature, namely that of the interview: a genre very close to that of a meeting and a face-to-face conversation; the latter itself is also rare (e.g. Rathje *et al.*, 2013). But in contrast with the genre of “conversations”, focusing on the themes discussed, the interview puts the author – the interviewed – and his/her practice at the centre of the narrative. Therefore, an interview lacks an indepth examination of the themes approached and the way practitioners think; on the other hand, it gains by offering a concentrated image of the practitioners’ diversity of preoccupations and actions.

The ten interviews which are included in this book were published first between 2005-2014 in the pages of an independent journal from Bucharest, Romania, named *Studii de Preistorie* (Prehistorical Studies) and published yearly (with two exceptions) by a professional organization: the Romanian Association of Archaeology (ARA). This long-term collaboration with *Studii de Preistorie* happened in a context of familiarity. Many of the ARA members had worked together with Doug Bailey in a research project started in 1998 in southern Romania (see the interview with Douglass W. Bailey at the end of this book). In addition, Bailey was one of the witnesses of the birth of this journal, a

publication he sustained by contributing to it from the first issue, and then serving as a member of the editorial board. The idea of the interviews appeared with the second issue (no. 2/2003-2004) and from that time it has become an important tradition.

As one will observe while looking at the table of contents of this book, the archaeologists that Doug interviewed are representative for a research philosophy known under the generic terms of postprocessualist or interpretative archaeologies. Some readers may find this unity limiting. Probably they would have liked the inclusion of other research traditions, such as the processualist, neo-evolutionist, Marxist and, why not, the cultural-historical, particularly as the latter remains dominant in many countries from Eastern Europe, including Romania. Perhaps, some would have liked more distinct voices from inside the broad field of the postprocessualism such as the advocates of a contemplative archaeology. However, choosing an interview subject must be seen in its context. On the occasion of the publication of each issue of *Studii de Preistorie* the interviews were realized without any intention to publish a book in what was then the future; the archaeologists who were interviewed, therefore are those who were familiar to the author. It was never the intention to represent all approaches in archaeology. The idea of publishing the interviews together in one volume came on the occasion of the tenth interview. The aim was to gather together the professional portraits of a group of archaeologists who were well known for their significant and innovative approaches. In spite of their, shall we say, notoriety, the process of putting them

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together took on a special sense in the context of Romanian archaeological practice where postprocessual approaches remain extraordinarily rare.

The texts of the interviews refer to researches conducted in Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the United States and often consider the Neolithic period. Each interview starts with a brief overview of the primary institutional and professional history of the archaeologist being interviewed. The topics touched upon in the interviews are among the most diverse: from reflections about the archaeologist's mission; the concrete practices of archaeology; the interaction with other disciplines that address the so-called "general public"; the practice of field research; the ways of approaching and interpreting material culture; the discussions about the interviewee's current or former projects; the policies and politics of academia; the practices of editing and publishing; the impact of particular reference works; and, finally, individual archaeologists' often humorous personal and literary preferences.

The interviews emphasize, especially, the recent preoccupations and work of those interviewed, but also contain references, even if sometimes only bibliographical, to their larger oeuvre of activity. Sometimes, it happened that topics one assumes are central to a particular person's work were not mentioned in the interview at all: for example, some readers from the East, like ourselves, wanted to see in the interview with Victor Buchli questions asked that related to his books *An Archaeology of Socialism* or *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia* (see the interview with Victor Buchli). Also,

for an understanding of the changes which took place inside the discipline, we had anticipated questions related to particular important moments in the professional biography of the interviewees: for example, Michael Shanks and his implication as a direct witness, in the early 1980s, of the stormy debates that took place in British academia concerning the agenda of postprocessual archaeologies.

In this book, almost all interviews are presented in as originally published in the pages of *Studii de Preistorie*. All the interviewed authors had the chance to review the original published interviews and to make corrections or additions. In any case, even where the original texts were not updated, the bibliographies listed at the end of each interview were updated in order to provide the most accurate information for the readers. We also have taken the liberty to correct minor typological errors that crept into interview texts due to the pressures of the original publication deadlines.

Finally, because of the limitations inherent to the condition of the written text as a genre of communication, we note, even now, that when we get to the end of each interview, we feel that there is a moment to pause and to consider how we as readers could meet the subject of the interview. We suggest that readers accept this invitation; meet each archaeologist through his or her interviews, and then continue that personal interaction by exploring his or her written work as listed in each chapter's bibliography.

Introduction

Reference:

Rathje, W., Shanks, M. and Witmore, C. (eds.), 2013. *Archaeology in the Making: Conversations through a Discipline*. London: Routledge.