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POINTS OF YOU

Brazilian Archaeology and the Pronapian's feeling

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I'm glad to have this opportunity to explain contract archaeology from a Brazilian perspective. We have lots of jobs and research going on, and we also have our own scientific identity. The understanding of our past resulted by the ambiguity of choosing whom Archaeology is interesting for: communities, politicians or our scientific aristocracy? It is not about the answers, it is about making the right questions. We need to be precise at any time, at any moment, at any cost. We have to be ethical, with ourselves and with others. That is the Pronapian message. By the way, Pronapian is the group of Brazilian scientists who worked for the National Program of Archaeological Research since the first North-American archaeological campaign in Brazil (1965).

We don't know exactly what we have done yet. So, what is the right question? What makes our Archaeology different? It is a simple question, but not a simple answer. We understand that we have a 'young' background compared with other regions of the world. That is difficult to grasp when we also have one of the most impressive material cultures ever seen. But now we also have a completely new perspective. We are not a weak colony anymore. Now we know about our things, and almost all of us are thankful for the Pronapian work. So, do we have our own paradigm?

We are now understanding contract archaeology, and how to make money selling our knowledge. In this context there is no place for a hard paradigm; it has to be flexible, clear and practical. We are fighting for a socially experienced archaeological science, through which citizens, like archaeologists, have ways to bring new information to society. Archaeology has to be public. Also, a new perspective of public; in order to get it, we need to be better archaeologists. We need vision, perspective and amplitude. It is hard not to be heard, but it is

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worst not being understood. If you do the right questions maybe you get better answers. So, let's be clear.

It is difficult to understand how we can practice a good Archaeology if we do not have a pioneer perspective, an original paradigm. Well, we have one. Brazilians were privileged by the Pronapian program, which gave us a very modern and creative tactic to comprehend our past. Now we have had the opportunity to acknowledge this program, because it is ours! We cannibalized it, digested it, and now we can produce our own theory, hybrid interpretation, also original. We are proud to be receiving foreign scientists, as there are a lot of places to dig. But remember: we are not that innocent anymore. Our perspective is stronger than ever, we grew up with our own experiences and we have learnt from our own mistakes. We are thankful for all the knowledge that Europeans and North Americans brought us. But now that we have created a new compendium of terminologies, fragments, value judgments, etc., we do not feel we need them anymore. We can work together, but from an equal position.

Being a businessman in Archaeology is equal to being an academic. The difference is in the pocket. This does not mean that I want to be rich (which of course I do). It means I also wish to contribute more; bringing new people to our discipline, and creating jobs and new perspectives, including theoretical issues. At this moment Brazil has only a dozen of cultural heritage companies, less than what would be expected from a big country like ours. The number of archaeological companies is increasing, but we are still one of the last ones in publishing new ideas.

Do you know anyone who feels miserable being an archaeologist? Or any archaeologist who worries about money? We all do. Anyway, I believe that a healthy archaeological environment contributes more than a polluted one. So, let's be creative, happy and original. Some results can only be right if you enjoy what you are doing. Do not take it that seriously. Remember that Archaeology is also a state of mind, conditioning your spirit to be satisfied.

There is another topic that concerns me; public/private knowledge and archaeological research. Some things must remain public. Why? There is a river of information flowing down there, right under our feet. If our work produces scientific knowledge, it must remain public. But, if private profits are huge compared to the efforts to be public, bringing scientific results to the community is, for sure, possible.

Is it ethical to make money with public heritage? Well, I don't find it ethical, unless it has a real impact on society. This is why archaeology must remain public. Local communities have the power to change and bargain our results because, among other things, we are not prepared to see things like them. Here is my suggestion: you should try and change your feelings about public archaeology contributions. Try to start a new nonprofit project all by yourself. It is not only about giving something back; it is about how you must contribute! And grow up with experience. Be mature. Be responsible and creative.

A basic part of the Pronapian's feeling is helping others to understand archaeology for free. I'm proud to be a Pronapian, to understand and respect my roots, to give more than empty criticism and revisionism and I hope you can share these feelings.

São Leopoldo, Brazil. November 25, 2010.

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