The development of Landscape Archaeology in Britain, present conflicts and possible new directions

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The development of Landscape Archaeology in Britain, present conflicts and possible new directions

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines the development of landscape archaeology in Britain from two perspectives, namely: methods used to identify patterns and changes in the landscape; and theories used to explain these changes. Current conflicting theoretical views are discussed, and the adoption of the mixed method approach as a possible future development that may bridge these contrasting views is examined.

INTRODUCTION

According to Lock (2003, p. 164), it is difficult to define Landscape Archaeology because this concept is ambiguous given the ambiguity of the term landscape itself. However, some definitions have been proposed. Matheny (1996), for example, defines Landscape Archaeology as a discipline that:

> ...is concerned with both the conscious and the unconscious shaping of the land: with the processes of organizing space or altering the land for a particular purpose, be it religious, economic, social, political, cultural, or symbolic; with the unintended consequences of land use and alteration; with the role and symbolic content of landscape in its various contexts and its role in the construction of myths and history; and with the enactment and shaping of human behaviour within the landscape (Matheny 1996, p. 384).

This definition implicitly involves two concepts that are relevant to Landscape Archaeology: methods used to identify patterns and changes in the landscape and theories used to explain these changes.

The aim of this article is to provide an overview of these two aspects of landscape archaeology with the purpose of outlining the development of Landscape Archaeology in Britain and possible directions that may be considered to address current theoretical conflicts.

METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

The issue of landscape has been of importance to archaeologists over a long period of time. Earlier works suggest the use of landscape as a frame to

contextualise excavation results. Some examples are the antiquarian chorography (*i.e.* antiquarian studies of history and geography of regional landscapes); William Stukeley's investigations (an antiquarian of the eighteenth century) who identified stratigraphic relationships at a landscape level by means of a form of phenomenological analysis; the work of Pitt Rivers at Bokerley Dyke in Cranborne Chase; the work of Heywood Sumner who studied ancient earthworks and their landscapes in the New Forest at the beginning of the twentieth century; and Curwen's approach who provided an explicit description of the field system in the north of the village of Grassington which included field enclosures, stones, earthworks and other features of the landscape (Curwen 1928; Swan 1971, p. 45; Barret *et al.* 1983, p. 193; Le Pard 1994, p. 2011; Peterson 2003, p. 395; Shanks & Witmore 2010, p. 97; Henry & Ellis-Schön 2017, p. 179). This earlier research into landscape was mainly focused on descriptions of current features present in the landscape. This descriptive approach was challenged in the 1950s by W. G. Hoskins, who not only included a historical evolutionary view of the landscape, but also demonstrated that it is the richest historical record available (*i.e.* the landscape is a palimpsest of boundaries, field systems, mounds, etc.) and also that it can be read (Hoskins 1955). In this decade, other influential contributors were O. G. S. Crawford who developed important methodological innovations of field archaeology and introduced the use of aerial photography in archaeology, and J. Bradford who used aerial photograph to explore historical sites (Crawford 1929 and 1953; Bradford 1957).

While the contributions described above are considered as important developments in the study of landscape history and field archaeology, it was not until the 1970s when the concept of Landscape Archaeology emerged explicitly and crystallised as a subject. Different reasons have been identified to explain this phenomenon (Fowler 2001, p. 16). Firstly, during the 1950s and 1960s arable farming increased significantly, resulting in the destruction of earthworks by ploughing. Secondly, these damages were identified by aerial photographs which were developed in this time. Finally, a number of archaeologists inspired by the work of Hoskins (1955) emerged. This new generation of archaeologists realised that the landscape was not really a product of the eighteenth century, as it was previously assumed, but much older. These factors led to the linkage between field archaeology and landscape history (Fleming 2006, p. 267). Note, however, that it can be argued that Pitt Rivers' work anticipated the fusion of field archaeology and landscape history, since his interest in linear ditches was animated by a desire to establish racial histories (Morton 2014, p. 168).

The emerging research in Landscape Archaeology in what is referred to as the English School was based on documentary, cartographic and archaeological sources (Finch 2008, p. 512). These techniques have formally been described by Aston and Rowley (1974) and Aston (1985): (i) historical documents were adopted to identify changes in the landscape; (ii) landscape fieldwork to observe and record relict earthwork and early pottery remains, among others; (iii) excavations to identify landscape changes from collections of pottery and other artefacts; (iv) maps to reconstruct past landscapes; and (v) aerial photography to examine cropmarks and earthworks.

A good example of how these techniques have been applied to study landscape is the research developed by Peter Fowler in West Overton and Fyfield, Wiltshire, over a period of thirty-nine years from 1959 (see Fowler & Blackwell 2009). Regarding historical documents, Fowler considered the A.D. 939 Anglo-Saxon charter and the 1567 Pembroke survey as evidence of long period occupation in the Overton Cow Down and Fyfield Tenants Down. Landscape fieldwork was carried out to identify critical points in the landscape with the objective of recording and establishing sequences by means of excavation. Excavations were conducted in Overton Down to investigate a Roman settlement. The Map of West Overton village in 1794 was used to reconstruct the landscape in that period of time. Finally, aerial photography was used to identify

prehistoric, Roman and medieval features in an area between East and West Overton.

Throughout the years, new techniques have been incorporated and adapted to develop research in Landscape Archaeology. Some relevant techniques are: (i) palaeoenvironmental sampling; (ii) Geophysics; (iii) Geographic Information System (GIS); and (iv) Satellite Image (for a discussion, see Lock 2003 and Rippon 2009). An example of palaeoenvironmental sampling is found in Fyfe *et al.* (2008) who used this technique to study the prehistoric landscape of the Bronze Age land enclosure on Dartmoor and to explore the chronology of this enclosure. An example of geophysical research in Landscape Archaeology is found in Powlesland 2009. This investigation was based on a gradiometer survey of an area of more than 1,200 ha in the village of West Heslerton (the southern side of the Vale of Pickering, North Yorkshire). The results revealed a significant number of features that allowed the researchers to identify the distribution of settlements and burial activities, chronological sequences, and to contextualise isolated archaeological sites within the landscape. Regarding GIS, a number of academic works have used this technique with different purposes in the context of Landscape Archaeology. For example, Llobera (2007) used GIS to investigate the visual patterns of prehistoric monuments in the Yorkshire Wolds. Finally, Satellite Image has been used to detect plough-levelled archaeological features in large areas of land. For example, Fowler & Fowler (2005) identified cropmarks in southern England from CORONA KH-4B satellite photographs.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

The methods described in the previous section have been very useful to identify and describe archaeological evidence in the landscape. However, the way in which the evidence should be interpreted has been a point of disagreement over a long period of time. The objective of this section is to explain these different theoretical thoughts and to describe how and why they were introduced into the debate concerning Landscape Archaeology.

According to Johnson (2007, p. 4), prehistorians and historians have adopted different paradigms to describe and interpret the archaeological evidence of the landscape. These differences can be traced back to before the 1970s when the concept of Landscape Archaeology crystallised as a subject. Before the 1960s, prehistorians believed that changes in the landscape (*e.g.* changes in archaeological settlement patterns) were explained by migrations and cultural diffusion; prehistoric economic and technological revolutions; affordances of soils, geology and other resources; and environmental fluctuations and climatic changes, among others (Crawford 1912, p. 192; Fox 1932; Godwin 1940, p. 241; Clark 1945, p. 57; Childe 1950, p. 3; Renfrew 1969, p. 151; Clark 1975, p. 3; Anschuetz *et al.* 2001, p. 164; Greene 2002, p. 81). In contrast, historians were focused primarily on descriptions rather than theoretical explanations of landscape changes (Finch 2008, pp. 512–13). For historians, archaeology became a secondary tool used to fill gaps in historical records (Johnson 2007, p. 3).

Prehistorians, recognising that landscape historians considered only partial archaeological evidence to fill historical gaps, realised that Hoskins' view should be revised. The main criticism was that there was an important gap between archaeological methods and theory, and this led to a non-theoretical analysis of historic landscapes (note that they would also have rejected his concern with historical particularity, as opposed to a desire to establish generalisations regarding human behaviour). Hoskins' view was formally criticised by a theoretical movement that emerged in the 1960s referred to as the New Archaeology (see for example Clarke 1968). This movement adopted a processual theoretical approach (*i.e.* processual archaeology) consisting of the application of scientific principles to the interpretation and explanation of past changes and culture processes (Renfrew & Bahn 2000, p. 38); that is, it comprises hypothesis testing within a positivist approach (Greene 2002, p. 244).

While the processual archaeology principally

involved researchers of prehistoric landscape archaeology, some attempts have been made to extend this approach to the study of historical landscapes (see for example Rahtz 2001). However, these attempts have been unsuccessful as a consequence of hostility from historic practitioners. Consequently, no unified theoretical approach linking historic and prehistoric research in Landscape Archaeology has been developed. In spite of this, methodological innovations introduced by the processual archaeology (*e.g.* sampling strategies, flotation for botanical remains, archaeozoology, etc.) were arguably more generalised.

The processual approach adopted by prehistorian landscape archaeologists has been challenged by a new movement referred to as post-processual archaeology. According to this school, archaeology cannot provide an objective view of the past because our own biases and perceptions are what dictate what we see in the archaeological record (Price & Knudson 2018, p. 68). They criticise processual approaches to archaeology based on the observation that traditional scientific methods and Cartesian models fail to capture subjective and qualitative aspects of the landscape, resulting in a sterile view of the landscape as neutral and external entity to human's experiences (Hicks 2016, p. 6). The post-processual archaeology includes different approaches that accept the inherent subjective of research. In the case of landscape archaeology, two relevant approaches are the taskscape and phenomenology.

The concept of taskcapes was introduced by Tim Ingold who defined it as the pattern of dwelling activities or an array of related activities (Ingold 1993, pp. 153–7). That is, it corresponds to a 'socially constructed space of human activity in the form of the areas of everyday actions understood as having spatial boundaries and delimitations for the purposes of analysis' (Mills & Rajala 2011, p. 2). This concept is related to the ideas of landscape, movement and temporality (Ingold 1993, p. 152; McFadyen 2007, p. 123; Hicks 2016, p. 8). Landscape is understood as the world as it is known by people who dwell in, and inhabit, its places

and move along their paths. Movement relates to the fact that human activities or tasks performed in the landscape are not static. On the contrary, they determine complex relationships between space, things, animals, and people; and they accumulate in the present landscape as a testimony of the lives and works of past generations. Finally, temporality is understood as a type of general quality of the landscape in which the passage of events is experienced by the human actors who are involved in the process of social life. The idea behind these concepts is that a taskscape is created by the continuous interaction between the landscape and humans and non-humans' activities carried out in the temporal process of inhabiting their environment, implying that an observed landscape is the results of cumulative actions over a period of time (Gruppuso & Ehitehouse 2020, p. 588). In contrast to processual archaeology, the taskscape approach links human's experiences and the landscape. That is, humans are part of the landscape and they affect each other through human's activities and the features present in the landscape (Ingold 1993, p. 152).

Tim Ingold's notion of the taskscape has been employed by both prehistorians and Romanists as a means of investigating human activity and artefact distributions at the landscape scale. An example is the work of Conneller (2000, p. 146) who showed how the production chain of flints can be placed in a landscape context, with the disperse activities of lithic production constituting a taskscape reflecting a community's relationship with their landscape. Another interesting work is the research developed by Rajalla and Mills who introduced the notion of ceramiscene, a type of taskscape defined as 'the landscape that is created, manipulated and experienced by the manufacturing, usage and disposal of material of deliberately shaped and fired clay' (2017, p. 64). Using this notion and a methodology designed to analyse Roman ceramics, they were able to obtain evidence for Republican and Early Imperial land use.

On the other hand phenomenology 'is concerned with the human encounter, experience and

understanding of worldly things, and with how these happenings come to be possible' (Thomas 2006, p. 43). It is a philosophy that is concerned with how human experience (and subjectivity) comes to be possible. The phenomenological thought began in the nineteenth century with the work of Franz Bretano, a German philosopher and psychologist, who argued that mental phenomena differ from physical ones in that the former are always directed at something. This directionality of conscious activity was defined by Bretano as intentionality. This concept greatly influenced Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher and mathematician, who was interested in identifying the fundamental structures of conscientious. According to Husserl's view, intentionality provides the basis for the relationship between people's experiences and their conceptualised world. That is, our ability to direct our attention to particular things, the chaotic and formless material world becomes comprehensible in the process of making these things as objects of consciousness (Hintikka 1995, p. 88). An important implication of this view is that science is built on theoretical abstractions that are secondary to the structures of experience. That is, Husserl's phenomenology is focused on pre-scientific analysis because experience and bodily engagement have priority over scientific explanation (Thomas 2006, p. 45).

The ideas of Husserl were revised by his pupil, Martin Heidegger, who was in agreement that science is powerless to understand fundamental aspects of human existence, but rejected the idea of universal and transcendental structures of consciousness. In particular, Phenomenology for Heidegger is concerned not only with consciousness, but also with the complex relationships between people and things constituting a human world understood as a structure of intelligibility (Frede 1993, pp. 53–7). In this view, things cannot be seen in isolation because they actually form part of a wider network of entities, and this is the weakness of Cartesian approaches which consider the world as a collection of independently existing entities (Thomas 2006, p. 47).

Key features of phenomenology are the concept of embodiment and sensory aspects of past human experience which occupy a prominent role in landscape archaeological research (for a discussion, see Tilley 1994). According to the phenomenological approach, direct experience with the landscape can inform about past interpretations because the landscape and humans are intimately related in a bidirectional or reciprocal relationship that can be understood through embodiment: individuals affect the landscape through human activities, and the landscape, in turn, affects individuals and social activities because it provides the medium for social practices. That is, landscapes provide affordance for living as well as a number of constraints that not only influence social activities, but also individuals' perceptions of the world (Hamilton *et al.* 2006, p. 32; Tilley 2010, pp. 26–35). This suggests that archaeologists' engagement and experience with qualitative aspects of monuments and landscapes in the present can be used as a way to deal with past interpretations (Brück 2005, p. 46).

According to Johnson (2012, p. 271), the adoption of phenomenology in landscape archaeology was influenced by three facts: a growing interest in the landscape as subjectively constituted; the nature of the archaeological data (*e.g.* local landscapes with a dense concentration of archaeological remains); and the development of a political agenda to archaeological and interdisciplinary study of the landscape. An example of this approach is found in Watson (2001) who used phenomenology to study the Neolithic landscape located in Avebury. This researcher used this approach to investigate how human social relationships could have been influenced by the aesthetic qualities of Avebury.

The phenomenological approach has been criticised by a number of researchers who argue that this approach hyper-interprets archaeological evidence as a result of its subjective nature and lack of references (Barret & Ko 2009, p. 276). It has also been criticised because phenomenology assumes the universality and timeless of the human body and topography. According to Brück (1998, p. 276), this assumption is weak because the nature

of Being may vary across time and space, according to the social context (*e.g.* gender, age, etc.), and according to human body variability. This implies that it is difficult to obtain generalisations from phenomenological analysis. Basing an interpretive archaeology on what we have in common with past people, and presuming that we can experience their experiences or think their thoughts, is arguably naïve (Johnson & Olsen 1992), and a more sophisticated approach might lie in emphasising that our experiences of landscapes are located in the present, but open up the possibility of a dialogue with the past. On the other hand, Fleming (2006) argues that this approach cannot be developed without the assistance of scientific methods and Cartesian models. How could a phenomenologist interpret a landscape palimpsest without using chronological sequence obtained from conventional scientific analysis? This criticism is, however, less compelling in that it is entirely possible to have forms of science that are not Cartesian (much of contemporary physics, for example).

BRIDGING CURRENT THEORETICAL CONFLICTS

The disagreement between processual and phenom-enological archaeologists is a problem that not only has arisen in landscape archaeology research. On the contrary, this is part of an old debate in general social sciences between pure quantitative and qualitative researchers who argue that mixing different research approaches is not possible from a philosophical point of view (Symonds & Gorard 2010, pp. 121–3).

Quantitative research is associated with the positivist philosophy which considers social observations in the same way that physical scientists treat physical phenomena. That is, it is based on the idea that social reality and social laws can objectively be tested by means of hypotheses using numerical approaches that allow researchers to confirm or reject theoretical social relationships. In this paradigm, the observer is assumed to be separate

from the entities that are subject to observation because there is only one truth corresponding to an objective reality that exists independent of human perception (Sale *et al.* 2002, p. 44).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is based on the interpretivist and constructivist philosophical approaches. It rejects the positivist paradigm under the argument that there exist multiple constructed valid realities related to a phenomenon (*i.e.* reality is socially constructed and is constantly changing). Consequently, context-free generalisations are not possible because there is no access to reality independent of our minds (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 14).

In spite of this disagreement, social science researchers have been able to mix quantitative and qualitative in what is referred to as mixed method approach (MMA). This approach is defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie as, 'the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study' (2004, p. 17). It is considered as a third methodological movement following the developments of quantitative and qualitative social science research (Creswell & Clark 2011, p. 1).

MMA has been accepted by the academic community and a number of investigations based on this framework have been published in formal academic journals (see for example Hogan & Berry 2011). This has been possible because supporters of MMA have provided strong arguments showing that mixing qualitative and quantitative data is feasible. For example, Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 16) explain that basic agreement between qualitative and quantitative academics has been facilitated by the replacement of positivism by postpositivism in quantitative research. To show this, note that postpositivism also assumes a fixed reality that can be theorised by means of logical reasoning. However, in this philosophical paradigm this reality cannot be perfectly identified from empirical analysis because this analysis depends on the empirical approach adopted by the researcher

as well as his/her own perception (Clark 1998, p. 1245). This is what facilitates the mixing of quantitative and qualitative research because both approaches provide different incomplete but complementary perspectives of the same phenomenon (Sale *et al.* 2002, p. 46; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 16).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in landscape archaeology has already been considered by some archaeologist working in this area. For example, Richards-Rissetto (2017) combined GIS and 3D techniques to represent ground-based humanistic perspectives of the landscape. Likewise, Hamilton *et al.* (2006) adopted phenomenology and other traditional techniques (*e.g.* GIS and re-examination of previous excavation and survey results) to investigate the Neolithic ditched enclosures of the Tavoliere as part of the Tavoliere–Gargano Prehistory Project. A final example is the work of Bender *et al.* (2006) who adopted quantitative and qualitative techniques to study the Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes on Bodmin Moor of South-West England.

Despite of the existing works mixing qualitative and quantitative data, the adoption of MMA is not a generalised practice by landscape archaeologists. Moreover, the problem that has emerged from such attempts is that there is a tendency for the products of the scientific investigations to be presented as the real landscape, while the experiential analysis comes to be understood as a perception that is derived from this, and as of secondary importance. This simply returns one to the position that phenomenology was intended to circumvent: analytic, academic views of landscape are given primacy, and these are arguably remote from the lives of people in the past.

In considering this problem, the adoption of MMA in landscape archaeological research to be meaningful should assign the same relevance to quantitative and phenomenological analyses. That is, quantitative and qualitative approaches should be seen as complementary. Actually, this level of integration is feasible from a philosophical point of view. This is because the philosophy associated with phenomenological analysis is interpretivism (Qutoshi 2018, p. 218), and the positivist philosophy that characterises the processual approach can easily be replaced by postposivism because archaeology, by definition, is a discipline that works with incomplete data (this implies that reality cannot be perfectly identified from empirical quantitative analysis). It is argued in this article that the formal and more massive adoption of the MMA in landscape archaeology is a fertile avenue for future research.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of Landscape in Archaeology in Britain can be analysed from two different points of view: methodological; and theoretical. From a methodological point of view, there are a number of techniques that have been introduced since Landscape Archaeology formalised as a subject in the 1970s. While some of them have important limitations, they all provide important assistance in the identification and processing of relevant evidence associated with historic and prehistoric landscapes. From a theoretical point of view, however, there is no single coherent concept today because different groups of researchers have adopted theoretical thoughts and approaches that seem to be irreconcilable at the present state of the research: landscape historians; processual landscape prehistorians; and phenomenology landscape prehistorians.

Recent developments in archaeology have proved that it is possible to create methodologies that bridge Cartesian approaches with phenomenology. While this extension has made little impact on landscape archaeological research, this integrative approach has successfully been implemented in other social sciences in what is referred to as the mixed method approach. The adoption of the mixed method in landscape archaeology will not necessarily lead to the unification of the competing approaches. It is more likely that it will be the beginning of a third novel research branch in landscape archaeology that will lead to a fertile avenue for future investigations.

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