

IS THERE A SHARED ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR TODAY'S AMERICAN  
ARCHAEOLOGISTS?

Today, archaeology is practiced in an array of venues, many without the traditional ties to academia or government. This expansion represents a notable change in the profession during the last 30 years that has been accompanied by an increasing range of ethical standards, principles, and values. These codes and statements are the products of national, regional and state archaeological professional and membership organizations, academic institutions, environmental and trade organizations, research institutions, and government agencies, to name just a few. Of course, the majority of American archaeologists are most familiar with the ethical principles vetted, updated, and published by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA). The most recent version dates from early 2007.

A selective review of current national ethical principles (see hand-out) and related literature confirms that there are shared standards of archaeological practice that largely have to do with data-sharing and other research relationships within the profession and accountability to clients, employers, funders, and communities of interest. These rules of behavior, prescriptive and normative, appear to be static and prohibitive and reveal limited concern for full participation of non-archaeologists in teaching, research, interpretation, or environmental protection processes. Recent literature recognizes broader responsibility to the communities of interest, descendent and protective communities, and recognition of their coequal status as owners of historical and cultural knowledge that is of great value to practicing archaeologists.

While these analyses may not be revolutionary they do encourage expansion of current notable efforts in collaboration that may help strengthen public archaeology and cultural resources management to the benefit of the resources, practitioners, the public, and other concerned owners of the past. Additionally, a few serious questions do emerge: Does archaeology have a shared vision of ethical thought and behavior that is relevant for practitioners in the future? If not, are we able to achieve a shared vision that is both rigorous and flexible? Is this vision moving toward a “virtue ethic,” as termed by Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2004) grounded in a collaborative environment of civic responsibility (Little and Shackel, 2007).

Several archaeologists look to formal professional standards and stronger enforcement procedures or sanctions as a means to establish and maintain credibility for the profession, particularly as it is observed from the outside by clients, partners, and administrators (Altschul, Davis, McGimsey). Laws, sanctions, rules, and codes are sound professional and business controls for practitioners who are also members of professional oversight organizations; they also function in presenting a sound, respectable and credible image to the public, lawmakers, and funders, especially those who fund archeological activities with taxpayers' and other public money.

If the need for definition of sound professional practice, sanctions and enforcement is compelling within the profession, then members need to take affirmative action to support the extant national registration organization, the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA). RPA is not tied to any specific national membership organization yet it has the potential for sufficient critical mass to be effective in protecting the integrity of the profession if practitioners truly want it. Because RPA is also not tied to state or

federal statutes or regulations, it established its own standards, sanctions and expulsion procedures without pressure or influence from other interested parties. Additionally, RPA it is able to respond relatively quickly to current or critical issues and concerns, if the directors and registrants concur. Of course, where there is controversy, the board and attorneys do debate, consult and deliberate, as is appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

Today, while many archaeologists believe extant codes and ethical principles do serve a useful purpose, still more recognize broader professional responsibilities to communities of interest, descendent and protective communities, and others with special knowledge about their history and claims to their heritage resources. Randall H. McGuire and Alan Simmons both remind archaeologists that issues of archaeological ethics are "real archaeology" and are far more complex than once believed (McGuire, 2003: vii-ix; Simmons, 1999:99-100). Neither claims that the complexities of relationships between archaeological practitioners and living communities did not exist in the past, issues of ownership and valid knowledge of the past were simply not recognized or accepted by the profession. This caused deep-seeded conflict between archaeologists and indigenous communities that some contemporary archaeologists argue is rooted in 500 years of power struggles between native and colonial populations (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 2004: 22; Thomas, 2000).

In order to correct for these oversights and establish less static and more productive and accommodating working relationships with indigenous stakeholders, archaeologists are employing new strategies that extend beyond simple accountability,

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<sup>1</sup> If state-based professional organizations want to establish their own procedures, the archaeologists need to take action and write the ethical standards and codes and identify sanctions and expulsion procedures, not merely express their interest. Otherwise, it will be done for them by well-meaning elected officials representing additional interests beyond archaeology (see McGimsey 1977:122).

some of which are adapted from applied anthropology. Archaeologists are using true consultation, collaboration, even applied civic engagement to ensure that the concerns, knowledge (intellectual property), and perspectives of contemporary indigenous, descendent, protective and other participant communities are integrated into the design, execution, reporting and dissemination of archaeological research (including Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, King, Little, Shackel, Scarre and Scarre, Lipe, and back in 1977, McGimsey). Active collaboration is the new ethic that will continue to enhance archaeological research and practice in future decades and prove to benefit and hold the interest of multiple concerned stakeholders and publics

It is clear that archaeologists in the United States and abroad want a strong and collaborative ethical framework and are personally and corporately committed to maintaining and supporting such a structure. Workshops and networks prevail at annual conferences and list serves within and among most of the professional organizations. Graduate and undergraduate syllabi for professional ethics and environmental ethics courses in departments of anthropology and interdisciplinary programs reflect an increasing concern that future practitioners have a broad-based understanding of ethical issues and behavior. The next steps, yet to be realized, should logically involve creation of mentoring and internship programs in private, public, governmental, and non-governmental organizations, perhaps organized by RPA or another national professional organization.

Rules and principles of ethical conduct define normative responsibilities to professional colleagues, clients, employees, students and multiple publics. They serve as useful guides to decision-making when archaeologists are facing possible conflicts or

ambiguities. Associated national registers and their broadly framed sanctions plus state-based professional registers with more narrowly devised sanctions and expulsion procedures provide the profession a means to establish and maintain credibility in the eyes of outsiders such as business, government, academic administrators, and multiple publics and stakeholders. Such professional performance controls, particularly those with a national or international focus such as RPA, are needed (Davis, 1984; McGimsey, 1972) and must be supported by the profession or other controls may be placed upon us by outside interests.

These normative rules of conduct and oversight controls established by professional self-regulatory registers, however, should not be the core defining principles behind contemporary ethical thinking, behavior, and archaeological practice. A contemporary ethic of collaboration, somewhat akin to a more traditional ethic of accountability, is acknowledged by a number of archaeological practitioners. True collaboration is generally achieved through a sense of civic responsibility to multiple publics and communities, including the indigenous and protective communities, clients, consulting parties, and professional peers in an array of disciplines. Building collaborative partnerships at the local level by establishing trust relationships and heightening and promoting the shared benefits of meaningful and protracted archaeological research and historical interpretation is the civic responsibility of archaeologists as individuals and as members and guests in various communities. Such ethical thinking and behavior will serve all the participants well into the future.

As most of the national codes plus those of the World Archaeological Congress (1990) acknowledge, these civic responsibilities must extend beyond our national

boundaries. While not explicitly discussed in this paper, the outcomes sought through archaeological collaboration recall those defined almost 60 years ago in the United Nation's Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted in December 1948. The Universal Declaration was proclaimed as the "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" in terms of respect for human rights. It lists numerous rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural - to which people everywhere are entitled. The Universal Declaration was conceived as a statement of objectives and not part of binding international law. Nonetheless, it may serve as a reminder to those concerned with ethical behavior and research and as potent instrument to apply moral and diplomatic pressure on states that violate the Declaration's principles. Of particular importance here is Article 27 which advances the rights of all to participate fully in their own cultural life..." and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits." Thus, collaborative archaeological endeavors, while simultaneously representing clearly different cultural traditions, will be scientifically and culturally valid if the efforts are designed with common visions and aspirations in an atmosphere of mutual respect and shared values.<sup>2</sup>

MORE...

See Lipe 2006 for an important and timely discussion of the effects of federal law on professional and ethical standards and the effect on one NGO's own code.

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<sup>2</sup> The full text of the 1948 Declaration may be found at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/> (last accessed October 29, 2007). See also outcomes of a one day meeting of experts on human rights and the environment in 2001 including explicit statements on the essential need of sustaining the natural and man-made environment (<http://www.unhchr.ch/environment/> (last accessed October 29, 2007)).

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