

FREUD AND VOLKAN

Psychoanalysis, group identities and archaeology

by
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Introduction

Recent discourse in archaeological theory has highlighted that the discipline's approach to existence and materiality is firmly entrenched in traditions of modern thought (Thomas 1996, 2004; Tilley 2004). It has also been shown that archaeological methodology has a tendency to be used as an interpretative metaphor by other modern disciplines in the description of their own methodologies (Miller & Tilley 1984: 1). For example, a popular topic in the archaeological and psychoanalytic literature has been Sigmund Freud's 'archaeological metaphor' which he used to help illustrate the role of the psychoanalyst in treatment (see below: Thomas 2004: 161-9). Freud was an avid antiquary, and much of his thinking seems to have been inspired by the discoveries and advancements of the then burgeoning discipline of archaeology (Ucko 2001). Although archaeology has inspired many thinkers such as Freud in the development of new systems of thought, archaeologists, by contrast, have not engaged sufficiently with other newly developed disciplines in order to inspire more balanced interpretations. For example, since archaeological material is often found to be central to modern social and political discourses of identity, it is important that archaeological theory begin to engage with the theoretical issues being raised by other disciplines concerned with identity formation and materiality (Meskell 2002).

Durkheim's (1938) separation of sociological and psychological enquiry in *The Rules of Sociological Method* hindered anthropologists and, in my opinion, archaeologists, in their understanding of 'broad based similarities in human behaviour' sought, for example, by Trigger (2003: 680). Trigger issued a call to bridge 'the rift created by Durkheimian and, more recently, anthropological preoccupations with purely social or cultural explanations . . . to produce more holistic and convincing explanations of cross-cultural similarities and differences in human behaviour' (2003: 688). I propose to move beyond Durkheim's separation of sociological and psychological enquiry and attempt to illustrate a way in which archaeology, psychology and psychoanalysis can act as more than metaphors for each other in the study of identity (Platt 1976; Paul 1989). In particular, I will be exploring the implications of research conducted by Volkan (1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), founder of the University of Virginia's Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction, who, in recent studies, has formally introduced his theory of the nature of the manifestation of 'large group identity and the role of 'internal object relations' in that manifestation. In this exploration, I will be using examples from Ireland which has been my place of work and study for the past seven years. I believe that by opening a dialogue between psychoanalytic theory and archaeological and anthropological theory, a better understanding of the role of archaeological material and enquiry in the formation of modern individual and group identity can be developed.

'Large group identity'

Studying the psychology of groups in 1921, Freud (1985) stressed the role of leader–follower interaction over intra-group relations in the construction of group consciousness. His vision of group psychology has been described by Volkan (2004: 36) as a maypole: the pole represents the leader, and the members dance around the pole, connected to it by tethers which represent Freud's concept of 'leader–follower interaction'. Thus the main avenue of

identification between group members and the group is via each member's connection with the leader. Bion (1955, 1961) developed Freud's theory, emphasising that just as a group depends on the existence of individuals, individual awareness displays characteristics of group psychology. Therefore, just as individuals and groups are not mutually exclusive, so too psychoanalysis and group psychology are not mutually exclusive pursuits. Following on from Bion's work, Volkan developed Freud's approach to the nature of group psychology. Volkan argued that it was the group intra-relationships that created group consciousness and resulted in what he termed 'large group identity'. 'Ego' or 'core identity' was defined by Erikson (1956: 57) as '*a sustained feeling of inner sameness within oneself . . . [and] a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others*'. Expanding upon this concept, Volkan (2003a: 50) articulated his definition of 'large group identity' as '*the subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are connected by a persistent sense of similitude*'. For Volkan, this encapsulates the phenomena of ethnic, national, religious and ideological identities. To Volkan (2003a: 51), group psychology is a tent. Freud's maypole still functions as the centre of the group, but instead of being connected to the leader via tethers, the group members are covered by a tent canvas created by weaving together the tethers and threads of their inter-relationships. The members, thus, are still concerned with keeping the pole upright (the leader in place) in order to keep their tent up, but they are equally concerned with keeping the tent canvas taut to protect all those underneath. It is the manufacture of the material of this tent canvas and the group members' actions to keep the canvas taut that constitute 'large group identity'.

Volkan (2003a: 51-61, 2004: 23-55) identified seven main threads among the many threads in the canvas of group identity. The first thread, 'shared identifications', is the basic phenomenon that connects an individual with the group. Volkan argued that during early development, a child will identify with the adult's cultural identity through social participation in the learning of language, traditional music, traditional dances, cultural preferences and mythology. All children go through this stage of development in the construction of their 'core identity', but what is significant is when children within a group share the same identification with a cultural concept. These identifications are what lead a child to make statements such as 'I am an Arab' (ethnicity), 'I am a Catholic' (religion) or 'I am an Estonian' (nationality). These identifications are reinforced by a second thread, 'absorption of others bad qualities', whereby the group supports the construction of their identity by defining themselves against the 'shared identifications' of a neighbouring group. However, this is not a crude accentuation of differences; no matter how much a group defines itself against another group, creating an 'other', the 'self' group will inherently 'absorb qualities' from the 'other' group. Simply put, a large group will create a dichotomy through the development of a notion of 'other'. This can be seen as a convenient way of creating an external object unto which the group can project its notions of 'bad qualities'. However, this is a false dichotomy as these qualities never cease to be part of the dynamic of the 'self' group. For example, the poet Heaney (1990) stated that in Ireland there is not a simple dichotomy of identity, an either/or. Rather, it is a complex interplay of both/and. Although people have engaged differently with the constructed identities of 'Irish' and 'British', proclaiming one as their own, in actuality Irish society has been (and arguably is) simultaneously both. In other words, if we simply examine the situation of Irish and British identity, we could say that Ireland was and is 'doubly cultural' or that there is a dual consciousness or indeed multiple consciousnesses (Orser 2001).

The orchestration of these identifications often occurs through a third thread, 'absorption of the leader's internal demands'. The impact of charismatic leadership in a large group is often crucial to the development of identity. Within a group, members will interact with the leader or the perceived image of the leadership by 'absorbing' the leader's or leaders' 'internal demands'. The group will take on the social, moral, ethical and political tasks which the

leadership internally demands of them. Volkan's study of the impact of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk on the course of Turkish cultural identity illustrates the role that a leader can have in the instilling of social tasks and cultural virtues in members of a large group (Volkan & Itzkowitz 1984):

'On August 25, 1925, Ataturk traveled to Kastomonu, north of the capital of Ankara, which had been described to him as one of the most conservative districts in Turkey. When he arrived, he appeared in a gray linen suit, its cut decidedly Western. He wore a tie and carried a white Panama hat in his hand. As though on signal, all the assembled men shed their Muslim-associated headgear — fez, turbans, kalpak — as Ataturk stepped into the crowd. By the time that Ataturk had returned to Ankara nine days later, he had destroyed the fez as an appropriate symbol of Turkishness; for Ataturk's Turkey, the Western-style hat was the new suitable reservoir' (Volkan 2004: 47).

Leaders appear in all sectors of society, and often non-political leaders can be more effective in shaping group identity. For example in Ireland, during the Gaelic Revival, Literary Renaissance and foundation of the Free State, writers such as William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey and Maude Gonne were highly influential in pronouncing and developing the nature of Irish identity within the Irish Free State during the early twentieth century (Kiberd 1995).

All of these identifications are given social relevance through two other threads: the establishment of a social narrative by selecting 'chosen glories' and 'chosen traumas'. These are the universally accepted significant 'historical' events or myths that unite the group's historical and mythical experience in one narrative (Cassirer 1979). In the words of Foucault, *'Since it is the mode of being of all that is given us in experience, History has become the unavoidable element in our thought'* (Foucault 1970: 238). Glorified events such as the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland or the Fourth of July in the United States of America are continually remembered and celebrated through social performances of parades and remembrance services and other materialisations of the fundamental ideologies of the large group (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996: 19) and, thus, become 'chosen glories'. 'Chosen traumas', in Volkan's (2003b, 2004) opinion, are much more potent. They have the weight of a notion of shared experience of pain, oppression, death, etc. They become the fuel for a notion of a 'union of the oppressed' or 'union of victimisation', bringing the members together in a common struggle against the perceived cause of the trauma. For example, the Irish 'chosen trauma' of oppression and victimisation resulting from the Great Famine of the 1840s (c. 1845-1849) and the subsequent periods of mass emigration encouraged the development of Irish 'large group identity' through the establishment of 'shared identifications' with the stories and symbols of the Great Famine and the call to externalise 'bad qualities' upon British society, the perceived cause of the 'chosen trauma'. The recent 'apology' issued by British Prime Minister Tony Blair (1 June 1997) to Ireland for the Great Famine and the subsequent reactions in Irish society illustrate that the 'chosen trauma' still has residual potency in both Irish and British society (Holland 1997).

While these five threads help create the foundation of a group's 'core identity', there are two other threads that interact closely with archaeological enquiry, namely 'suitable reservoirs' and 'protosymbols'. Both involve material culture and its relation with the mind. Through psychoanalysis, this has been explored using the theory of 'internal object relations', which will now be briefly reviewed.

'Internal object relations'

The development of object relations theory is quite complex and contentious (Greenberg & Mitchell 1983). There are a number of different schools of thought such as those represented by Fairbairn (1952), Winnicott (1958) and Klein (1975) from the UK and Jacobson (1964), Mahler (1968) and Kernberg (1976) from the USA. In brief, this area of theory refers to the fundamental relationships that children develop with the objects that surround them, objects that can be both animate and inanimate. Children participate in their world by interacting with the objects in their environment which results in their '*development of a cohesive selfrepresentation*' (Jacobson 1964; Mahler 1968; Kernberg 1970; Volkan 2003a: 53). This development of a 'self-representation' is often guided, either consciously or subconsciously, by adults who lead the child to experience certain objects as part of the group (good) or as part of others (bad), facilitating a fundamental modern dichotomy of identity. Metaphorically, the individual during childhood development externalises expectations that they have of themselves and of life onto these objects creating 'object-' and 'self-images'. They will then internalise and integrate aspects of these expectations in the formation of their 'core identity' (Erikson 1956; Volkan 2003a); however, sometimes these expectations are not integrated into the 'core identity' of the individual and remain externalised in 'reservoirs' of unintegrated images. Although this dichotomy of self and object illustrates the modern qualities of much psychoanalytic enquiry, I feel these concepts are useful as metaphorical tools for understanding the role of material culture in the modern 'self/other' discourse which facilitates and maintains conceptions of modern group identity. As Tilley notes, '*Material forms may thus act as key sensuous metaphors of identity, instruments with which to think through and create connections around which people actively construct their identities and their worlds*' (2004: 217).

When an entire group share an object relation or a 'reservoir' of un-integrated externalisations, then we can see that relation constituting a development of group identity. When these shared 'internal object relations' become constant, they become an example of a sixth thread of Volkan's canvas of 'large group identity', 'suitable reservoirs'. For example, the symbolic form of the stone 'High Crosses' of Ireland can be seen as 'suitable reservoirs' for the shared externalisation of Irish Catholic 'large group identity' particularly during the political developments of the nineteenth century such as Daniel O'Connell's Home Rule Movement (Harbison 1994: 14). In Volkan's words (2003a: 54), '*the abstract concepts of Finnishness, Scottishness, Jewishness or Germanness slowly become associated with the suitable reservoirs of externalised images*'. Metaphorically, as individuals in the group internalise the 'object-images' from the 'suitable reservoirs', they internalise the abstract concepts which the objects represent. The object is conceived of and experienced as an external aspect of the group's psyche, a reification of and a material buttress to the core identity of the group (Tilley 2004: 218).

In extreme cases, these objects can offer examples of a seventh thread of Volkan's canvas: 'protosymbols'. In moments of social crisis, objects and images can be imbued with emotion, causing them to actually become the abstract notion that they represent. From the perspective of the study of materialisation, it could be said that society manifests its ideology during crisis situations by creating or 'finding' material objects that represent the ideology and identity of the large group (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996: 16-20). However, these relationships are not limited to periods of crisis. Sometimes when an object becomes a 'protosymbol', it can remain so for the purpose of maintaining the 'large group identity'. For example, during debates over an amendment to the National Monuments Bill of Ireland of 1993, Higgins (1994), then Minister of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht said:

'For many people it is the artefact or monument itself that symbolises the identity of a people. The images such as those printed on the front cover of every school child's homework copy as a daily

reminder of the physical manifestation of our heritage are part of what we are—the Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Brooch, the Monasterboice High Cross and the Borrisnoe Collar’.

Materiality and group identity

We live in a world ripe with meaning and are continually engaged in the interpretation of both self and object in the development of an awareness of being in the world (Tilley 1994, 2004; Heidegger 1996; Thomas 1996, 2001). The nature of this interpretation lies in the relational qualities of human being. Body and mind are not a duality. Rather they are co-existent — mutually and continually intertwined in interpretative participation in the world as an embodied mind (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968; Tilley 2004: 22). Thus, humans constructing a world view are not static receivers of information from static objects, but are constantly engaged in daily practices which interpret existence and continue the hermeneutic spiral of thought (Bordieu 1977; Gosden 1994: 58-61; DeMarrais *et al.* 1996: 16). These daily practices are what allow humans to cope with the nature of their daily existence (Thomas 2004: 185). Many of these practices are brought together and described in the recently developed theory of materialisation. *‘Materialisation is the transformation of ideas, values, stories, myths, and the like, into a physical reality—a ceremonial event, a symbolic object, a monument, or a writing system’* (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996: 16). Humans participate in and interact with their environment and each other in continual interpretative acts that result in material expressions of their conception of existence as a mode of empowerment and affirmation of existence. This includes, but is not limited to, performances, creation of objects, construction of monuments, adaptation of a landscape or the creation of texts. In this way, the concept of materialisation is a less modern and more inclusive discussion of the social phenomenon of environmental participation described by object relations theory as internalisation and externalisation.

DeMarrais *et al.* (1996: 17) stated that materialisation often occurs as a strategic expression of ideology and declaration of power. However, I would argue that this phenomenon is a fundamental, behavioural, participatory and interpretative aspect of humans in modern large groups, and thus, it can be seen as an impressionistic description of the results of Volkan’s theory of ‘large group identity’. For this reason, the theory of materialisation is useful in a study of group identity as a descriptive metaphor for human experience of material objects. It appreciates modern concepts of object relations but also transcends modernity in its appreciation of participatory and interpretative experience.

Archaeology as materialisation

This analysis can also be applied to the practice of archaeology itself. In an allusion to archaeology, Freud (1964: 259-60) described the archaeologist’s excavation for artefacts as a search for ‘remains found in the debris’, and he compared it to the psychoanalyst’s search for ‘fragments of memories’ in treatment. Freud (1964) believed that ‘the two processes are in fact identical’. Whether or not this is a useful metaphor, it is evident that there is a strong relationship between the nature of the archaeological artefact and the mind — between the ‘remains found in the debris’ and the ‘fragments of memories’ (Thomas 2004: 161-9). Indeed, it is arguably inappropriate to make any distinction between the material and the mind (Tilley 2004: 24), for the strength of this relationship lies in the performative qualities of archaeological discovery and the participatory qualities of heritage consumption intertwined in the corporeal experience of the embodied mind.

In this sense, archaeology can be described as a daily practice of materialisation to affirm identity and existence. It is a materialisation of the ideologies of self, group, past and being human through the performance of and participation in excavations, the manipulation of objects or artefacts, the discovery and interpretation of monuments, the adaptation of landscape, the construction and performance of exhibitions of artefacts and the writing of texts to communicate the experience and interpretation of the past. The difficulty of performing archaeology is that the objects with which we work are the result of previous human agency and the materialisation of previous human ideology, and these objects are then re-materialised through our archaeological enquiry. As archaeologists, we facilitate the production of a social memory rooted in the mental perception of material evidence of past action (Jones 1997: 15). We study and discover artefacts and monuments, and these material objects, more often than not, become 'suitable reservoirs' in 'large group identity'. This is not a phenomenon that should be seen as unnatural, but as integral to the behaviour of human beings in modern large groups. This is part of the difficulty with the way many archaeologists approach the phenomenon of modern group identity.

Much archaeological literature has attempted to expound a theory of identity but without engaging with the pre-existing literature on the phenomena of social being and identity formation. Gosden (1994: 101-30) argued in his book *Social Being and Time* that to understand the ways in which we arrive at meaning through archaeological enquiry, we must first understand the fundamental philosophical assumptions we make when we begin any such enquiry. Thomas (1996: 11-6) made it clear that archaeology must deal with theories of not only materiality but also the mind. We should work towards a continual awareness of interpretative being in the world (Gosden 1994: 113-4; Thomas 2004: 187-9). Just as our experiences of the world are part of a fluid interpretative existence, so too are our engagements with archaeological objects (Tilley 2004). It is critical that we appreciate the current nature of archaeological enquiry in order to overcome the modern societal tendency to assert facts and singular, authentic ethnicities based on the perceived, constant materiality of artefacts.

Recent studies by Peter Heather (1996) on the Goths and Catherine Hills (2003) on the English provide examples of the importance of this self-awareness in archaeology. Hills and Heather put forth dynamic analyses of ethnic identity through their acknowledgement that there is a complex social situation today and that equally there would have been complex and fluid social identifications in the past. Heather's (1996: 6) two conclusions in his introduction to *The Goths* that '*there is no such thing as an unchanging identity*' and that '*cases corresponding to both ends of the spectrum (more or less solid group identities) are well documented in the present day*' provide a strong, self-aware foundation for his dynamic engagement with the stagnant notion of an unchanging 'Gothic' identity. The development of such a fluid and dynamic appreciation of these contemporary psychoanalytic phenomena facilitates a more balanced approach to issues of identity and ethnicity and social patterning in history and prehistory. I feel that these two studies reinforce the notion that archaeology is not a stagnant project aiming to produce a single generalised history for all time, but it is a continual interpretative engagement with existence through perceptions of materiality (Tilley 1990: 340).

The importance of acknowledging subjective and interpretative approaches to the study of the past is that artefacts, monuments and archaeological research itself may be used to legitimate ideologies and identities and support the formation of power structures (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996: 17). Archaeology is a signal of a certain level of social organisation and ideological power in that it is an extremely complex and expensive endeavour. As leaders and states invest in archaeological research (especially excavation), they often expect a material return, and often this return is a materialised ideology or identity in the form of an

artefact, monument or textual history. The recent volume by Galaty and Watkinson (2004) on the exploitation of archaeology for ideological purposes in dictatorships demonstrates the influence that archaeology can have over social consciousness when controlled by a governmental system. Archaeology can be a method of encouraging the 'absorption of the leader's internal demands' in order to create a 'large group identity' that supports the dictator. As archaeology facilitates the provision of artefacts and monuments to society, so too can it provide 'suitable reservoirs' and 'protosymbols' for 'large group identity'. Hobsbawm (1992: 3) illustrated this relationship when he wrote that '*historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market*'. This is what archaeology inadvertently does. It supplies the raw materials for the 'shared identifications' and 'internal object relations' that form 'modern large group identity'. Archaeology is a materialisation of the attempt of humans to cope with their own existential awareness in order to affirm their own experiences. For as Meskell (2001: 189) points out, '*It is the very materiality of our field — the historical depth of monuments and objects, their visibility in museums, their iconic value — that ultimately have residual potency in the contemporary imaginary*'. In this way, archaeology itself can be seen as one of the many threads in Volkan's tent.

Group identity and heritage

Modern perceptions of archaeology have helped to reify socially conceived dichotomies such as 'self/object' and 'self/other'. Engaging with these dichotomies, psychology has described society's relationship with artefacts and their corresponding archaeological interpretations as an internalisation in the construction of group identity. Although I take this description to be metaphorical, the modern concept of internalisation does have strong similarities with the observable phenomenon of consumption. This is precisely why there has been so much discussion of 'heritage consumption' and of a need to 'market heritage' within the growing marketplace of ideas and commodities. In contemporary western society, consumption is beginning to eclipse other forms of social participation as the primary performance of identity. Foster (1999: 263-6) argues that there has been a displacement of agency in society resulting in the eclipsing of the role of citizen in society by the role of consumer. In many societies, most notably the contemporary United States of America, '*consumption choices appear to form the basis for nationality as a collective identity*' (Foster 1999: 265). Thus the individual's relationship to cultural objects such as artefacts is no longer simply a psychological, behavioural internalisation but an active, capitalistic consumption. This situation is important for archaeology because often artefacts and their corresponding representations in souvenirs and postcards become the commodified materialisation of heritage. In fact, the move to market heritage has gone so far that often an individual's only experience of heritage is through an act of consumption. The interaction of society with archaeology through the media of museum exhibits, interpretative sites and heritage tourism encourages the materialisation of archaeological objects into 'suitable reservoirs' and into 'protosymbols'. The marketing of these opportunities for 'heritage consumption' elevates relations with an artefact in society to the point that the archaeological object will be marketed as a reification of the abstract notion of identity (Tilley 2004: 218). The danger of this situation, as Foster (1999: 270) notes, is that '*the materialisation of nationality in the form of consumable objects and experiences leaves the nation vulnerable to the market . . . what if mainly non-nationals buy—and so demand nationality in the forms that they prefer?*'. I suggest that artefacts form a visual information system that functions at the core of many cultural and social groups. They are an integral component of society's visual literacy, inspiring many groups in the construction of their identity. However, it is a visual literacy that, like corporate brand names, has been ever more encouraged and exploited in the construction of heritage industries and the development of 'heritage consumption' (Evamy

2003). Cooney (1996: 160) noted, '*It could be suggested that by default we as archaeologists are allowing the selection of elements from the past to be used for the dictates of the present, for example in the heritage and more broadly tourism industry, which is so central in the projection of a modern Irish identity*'.

It is this role of archaeology in 'heritage consumption' that highlights the responsibility that archaeologists have to endeavour to transcend modernity and encourage the 'heritage consumer' to actively participate with the objects of the past in a continually interpretative exchange rather than simply being passive recipients of socially constructed notions of identity.

Conclusion

Although the objects of the past are silent in themselves, Freud (1962: 192) in another of his allusions to archaeology stated that '*Saxa Loquuntur!*' or 'Stones Speak!', but only by using our lips. The archaeological record becomes relevant through acts of participation and materialisation which are performed in excavations, interpretations, exhibitions and the writing of texts to explicate the material. I argue that the archaeological object acts both animistically as a shared reference point and totemistically as a mental signifier for society to maintain a consistent sense of similitude or identity. Indeed, there appears to be a current psychological necessity for these archaeological materialisations and archaeological participation in society.

I have argued that it is vital to engage with disciplines such as psychoanalysis to better understand the interaction between the individual and the archaeological object in modern society. I think that the applied psychoanalysis of researchers such as Volkan can help to develop amore balanced concept of the ways in which large groups and individuals consume archaeological objects as icons to fulfil modern psychological desires for identity. Also, I feel that an engagement with the current psychoanalytic material on identity will inspire archaeologists to find a way to interact with society in continually interpretative exchanges. As Anderson (1991) argued, nations are imagined communities, and Thomas (1996: 63-4) has made it evident that we must be aware of the inherent role of 'archaeological imagination' in society. Volkan has shown that 'large group identity' is a behavioural construction of the mind, and I argue that there is a modern, behavioural, interpretative tendency to establish what could be called the 'archaeologically imagined' society. Therefore, I feel it is crucial that archaeologists and archaeological theorists engage with other modern disciplines in order to transcend modern modes of thought and renew interpretative and participatory exchanges between archaeology and society.

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