Archaeology on the move in Argentina

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The 15th Argentine Archaeology National Conference was held at the university campus at Río Cuarto, Cordoba Province, Argentina, from 20-25 September 2004. The *Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto* received more than 1200 registered participants, 640 of them contributing papers whose abstracts were published in a comprehensive volume, 470 pages long (ISBN 9506652813), as well as in a compact disk format (ISBN 9506652724). Scholars from several countries took part in the conference, notably Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, although most participants were Argentinean.

The 15th Conference sessions enabled participants to note the growing interest for the social understanding of the archaeological past, beyond mere description and empirical reporting. If in previous conferences the main interest were related to such themes as environmental adaptation, evolution, classification and typology, now those traditional subjects are complemented by the study of the social consequences of the archaeological work, but also by the discussion of such issues as social inequalities, material culture and modern societies, social theory, among several other subjects related to the social and political aspects of the discipline. In the wake of the World Archaeological Congress introduction of Indigenous participation in archaeological conferences, since the mid 1980s, at the 15th Argentine Conference the participation of native peoples was a novelty and says much about the growing awareness of the social consequences and responsibilities of archaeological practices. Accordingly, in the plenary session, Indigenous issues were discussed and an ad hoc committee was established.

The conference comprised symposia and round tables. The former were the result of the initiative of participants who proposed themes to be discussed, such as:

Archaeology of architecture: shape and contents
Material discourses in modern society
Ceramic studies: theoretical and methodological advances
Directions in the study of stone artefact assemblages: new trends in theory and methodology
Time and the use of animal resources
Processes relating to the formation of the archaeological record
Social consequences of archaeology
Theory and method in the archaeological study of social inequality
Underwater archaeology: management, research, conservation and education about underwater heritage
Archaeological theory paths in South America

Round tables collecting papers on several subjects continued the tradition of descriptive titles and emphases, such as:

Archaeology of the Argentine Northwest
Archaeology of the Argentine Midwest
Archaeology of the Argentine central hills
Archaeology of the Argentine Pampa
Archaeology of Patagonia
Historical archaeology

The organisation of the conference was quite good, considering the huge numbers of people and papers. However, several sessions, such as the discussion of social inequality, were held in small rooms, unable to admit all those interested in taking part in the discussion. We suspect that the unexpected interest in social issues led to the underestimation of several symposia. Social activities, including the reception and party, were

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very nice and the Argentine hosts were really welcoming.

Students from several parts of Argentina were a majority, reflecting the growing popularity of archaeology in the country. There were also several professionals from South American countries, contributing to a closer cooperation in the whole continent. The largest foreign team came from Brazil, showing how the discussion in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, once so isolated and peculiar to each country, comprises a set of common concerns. This move is clear also in the fact that the two foreign keynote speakers were Arno Kern, from Brazil, and Luis Lumbreras, from Peru. In the context of a political understanding of archaeology, the critical assessment by Lumbreras of the Latin American Social Archaeology struck a chord with the audience, leading to enthusiastic clapping recognising the importance of social engagement in face of a history of authoritarian rule in the continent, challenged since the 1970s by social archaeology. Lumbrera's lecture was received as an incentive to study the social history of archaeology in Latin America and to struggle for a committed discipline.

The conference has shown the variety of theoretical and political stands in archaeology in Argentina and the whole region. Even though theoretical discussions were held mostly in a number of theoretically oriented sessions, debates were very productive. We look forward to the next conference for a broadening of those debates, for the benefit of archaeology and society at large.

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