

Round Table Proposal

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Theme:

Archaeology and Material Culture: Interpreting the Archaeological Record

Title Round Table:

Eco-Archaeology. A New Perspective to explore the technological changes of garbage

Abstract:

Archaeology proceeds from the assumption that all things change over time, and that material culture and its spatial relationships can tell us about the people who produced it. Human beings during their lifetime produce and manage different kinds of raw materials that after their consumption are transformed into garbage, therefore, we are going to look at garbage assemblages - such as, pottery, weapons, bottle caps, plastic objects, glass, small mechanical parts etc. - and try to ascertain what sort of activities produced it and what can tell us about the people who did it.

The study of garbage has a long tradition in archaeology, but always a classical topic could be subject of new interpretations. In our case we believe that by examining how the deposition has changed in a limited time horizon one can get interesting information from micro-changes. Additionally we believe that analysing changes in materials or changes in form or its attributes over relatively short periods of time mean to “excavate” humans’ technological mentality.

An example of technological mentality to be “excavated” is the production of garbage at the passage from industrial to post-industrial society.

Industrial society, whose imperative was “consumption” by all means, produced tonnes of consumption goods which after their deposition became long-lasting garbage. This is very visible for example in the former Socialist block nations where the un-consumed materials of the Industrial era form a thick un-recycled layer of deposition.

Still nowadays in the Western post-industrial society the imperative has not changed, but what has changed is the way to produce “garbage” in an eco-logical way and of course the archaeological layer now is thinner than the previous one due to recycling and the technological changes in materials. Now ecology became a current attitude and the new technological mentality will definitely influence the archaeological approach.

We also believe that archaeologists, in order to understand contemporary and future archaeological record, shall approach garbage through a new sub-discipline, the eco-archaeology.

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