

# Ethnoarchaeology of Iran

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# Course Subjects

- Introduction to ethnoarchaeology
- Practical exercises in observation and interpretation
- Case studies of ethnoarchaeological projects in (a) Iranian Villages, and (b) among pastoral nomads
- The role of ethnoarchaeology in the future

# Analogy

“Archaeological interpretation is founded and ultimately depends upon analogy – a form of inference that holds that if something is like something else in some respects it is likely to be similar in others.”

# Analogical Principles

- The subject and source cultures should be similar in regard to variables likely to have affected or influenced the materials, behaviors, states, or processes compared.
- If the source culture is the historic descendant of the subject culture there is a greater likelihood that similarities between the two will exist that if there is no antecedant-decedant relationship.

# Definition

- “Ethnoarchaeology is a research strategy embodying a range of approaches to understanding the relationships of material culture to culture as a whole, both in the living context and as it enters the archaeological record, and to exploit such understandings in order to inform archaeological concepts and improve interpretation” (David and Kramer, *Ethnoarchaeology in Action*, 2 (2001))

# Other Definitions

- “Ethnographic fieldwork carried out with the express purpose of enhancing archaeological research by documenting aspects of sociocultural behavior likely to leave identifiable residues in the archaeological record” (David and Kramer 2001:12).
- “The anthropology of human residues” (Gould 1978).

# Cautionary Tales

Archaeologists should be aware that “there is a general lack of coincidence of use and discard locations, for example, and the accumulation of refuse along fences and, as middens, in areas of minimal other activity”. Observation derived from study of villages in the Amazon, but applicable elsewhere.

# Uses of Ethnoarchaeology

- Identification of artifacts and processes – the behavioral correlates - through analogy
- Cautionary tales where analogy is misleading
- Insight into intangible aspects of behavior, based on contextual similarities, i.e., family structure or community organization
- Contribute to history of an illiterate people



# Actualistic Studies

- Research to provide analogies that involves a field or near-field component, but no laboratory conditions.
- Replication studies
- Taphonomy – site formation processes
- Animal behavior - e.g., hyena -that impacts condition and distribution of bones

Table 3.1 *Information required for assessment of field methodology and methods*

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*Research context*

Location and cultural and historical context of group or groups studied  
Political context of research, including situation of the researcher, and funding  
Conditions and duration of fieldwork  
Investigator's knowledge, including linguistic competence, of the group and its language

*Ethnographic methods and techniques*

Sampling of group or groups:  
strategies  
numbers of settlements/households/individuals  
representation of classes/ranks/statuses/roles/genders

Research methods

participatory observation  
interviews  
questionnaires  
other, including reenactments and experiments

Assistants (paid)

qualifications and relationship to informants

Informants

categories and how recompensed

Records

written materials, photographs, visual and sound recordings  
ethnographic and other material samples  
location and access

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# Think About Adaptations

## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Geology  
Topography  
Climate  
Weather  
Soils  
Hydrology  
Plants  
Animals

## USES OF NATURAL LANDSCAPE

Wild resources  
Springs/rivers  
Pasture  
Arable land  
Routes  
Barriers

## ALTERED LANDSCAPE

Houses/tents  
Farms  
Terraces/canals  
Graze pastures  
Cut forests  
Plow/hoe  
Harvest crops  
Raise livestock  
Fertilize  
Make Trails/roads  
Other built facilities

# INTERPRETATION

- Pick a period – Paleolithic, Mesolithic hunter-gatherer, Neolithic, Bronze Age
- What resources were available?
- What technology was available?
- What social-cultural organization?
- How large was the population?
- Were they mobile or sedentary?
- Where would sites be?
- How to recognize them?

# WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

- What do you want to accomplish?
- What is already known?
- Are there gaps in information?
- Are previous interpretations convincing?
- What investigations can you make?
- What methods will you use?
- How will you test your results/conclusions?

# COURSE PROJECT

- Within Brno or surroundings where you have access
- Define a problem of archaeological interest
- Develop a methodology
- Carry out the fieldwork
- Write a report, illustrated as necessary
- Evaluate the results in relation to the problem
- Make suggestions for follow-up fieldwork