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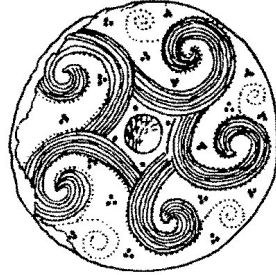
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THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM. A REPLY TO SEBASTIAN BRATHER

Florin Curta¹

Abstract: According to Sebastian Brather, “ethnic identity” is beyond the reach of archaeology. He wants to separate archaeology from history in order to exorcise from German archaeology (especially, medieval archaeology) the demons of Kossinnian culture history. At stake seems to be an explicit discussion of archaeological theory, and more particularly, the nature of the archaeological record and its interpretation. At a closer look, Brather’s claim that “archaeology cannot apprehend and explain individuals” is remarkably similar to Lewis Binford’s fifty-year old observation that “we cannot excavate a kinship terminology or a philosophy.” According to him, material culture is not directly tied to social, economic, or cultural processes (Prozesse), but instead reflects them indirectly. This is a plainly processualist claim that change happens within the entire system and not just within one of its components. However, despite some clear similarities between his mode of thinking and the agenda of New Archaeology, Brather’s attempt to bring cultural process into focus is neither consistent, nor explicit – a direct consequence of the traditional reticence towards New Archaeology among German archaeologists. Rather, Brather’s processualist inclinations do not allow for any actor perspective in order to understand how change comes about. To Brather, what the individual in the past thought or desired has nothing to do with “culture, power, and representation.” Agency is thus effectively eliminated from any “objective” discussion of ethnicity. Moreover, ethnicity may be a form of social representation, but it is also “something (else)” that has apparently nothing to do with common origin.

Keywords: ethnicity, New Archaeology, German archaeology, agency, archaeological theory

In what follows, at stake is definitely not whether archaeology is a historical discipline, nor, indeed, whether ethnicity existed in the medieval past (as opposed to more recent times). Certainly, in common with many another skeptical archaeologists studying the Middle Ages, Sebastian Brather has long declared his firm belief that, in light of the Hawkesian ladder of inference, “ethnic identity” is beyond the reach of archaeology². Brather’s approach might be criticized for failing to consider the arguments of those with more optimistic views about archaeology than his own, from Lewis Binford to John Moreland. The former famously refuted the Hawkesian ladder of inference, according to which the incomplete nature of the archaeological record makes it impossible for archaeologists to be true historians, concerned, as it were, with such questions as religious institutions, law, or spiritual life. Binford argued instead that our ability to generate knowledge of the past was not inherently blighted by the supposedly incomplete nature of the archaeological record (for the medieval period, at least, the written record

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² BRATHER 2002a, 175; HAWKES 1954.

is not “complete” either), but rather by what he called “methodological naiveté”—the greatest obstacle in the way of moving from the statics of the archaeological evidence to the dynamics of the past human behavior³. John Moreland, while noting that a similar hierarchy of esteem exists within the sciences, observes that “archaeologists [themselves] have been among the most vociferous in the clamor to confine archaeology to the lower rungs of the interpretative ladder”⁴. This most certainly applies to Sebastian Brather as well. Mercifully, he does not subscribe to the still widespread idea of archaeology’s subservience to history; equally, he condemns Volker Bierbrauer’s claim that by abandoning any concern with “ethnic interpretations,” archaeology ceases to be a historical discipline⁵. Instead, Brather wants to separate archaeology from history in order to exorcise from German archaeology (especially, medieval archaeology) the demons of Kossinnian culture history. He believes that an obsessive preoccupation with cultural phenomena unjustly shifts the emphasis of research away from the social structures of the early Middle Ages. The interpretation of the archaeological record should aim at reaching not historical, but “structural” (*strukturgeschichtliche*) and anthropological (*kulturanthropologische*) conclusions⁶.

In reality, at stake is an altogether more fundamental issue. The elephant in Sebastian Brather’s room is an explicit discussion of archaeological theory, and more particularly, the nature of the archaeological record and its interpretation. To be sure, Brather’s understanding of what ethnicity is and how it works most evidently evolved since the publication of his 2004 book. His last response to my critique looks elegant and subtle but in fact veils the true extent of the fundamental fissures that mark the contemporary German debate on ethnicity in archaeology from the eyes of those less tutored in archaeological theory. Accordingly, and in order to make the elephant explicit, I will not engage in polemics over minute details, testing the worthiness of Brather’s response against a supposed orthodoxy of archaeological theory. Instead, and with the aid of a brief exploration of some of his studies, I shall attempt to “unlock” a unifying if subconscious theme of his work on “ethnic interpretations” – the desire to introduce a processualist agenda to German archaeology.

The notion of process clearly has relevance far beyond a simple examination of Brather’s position on ethnicity, and in structuring my reply I also hope to shed some light on a wider theoretical debate in medieval archaeology. More particularly, I hope to alert English-speaking archaeologists – more particularly those working on the Middle Ages – to the unpalatable reality that the reform of archaeological thinking in Central Europe has brought to the fore the tenets of the now old New Archaeology, and that establishing any kind of dialogue requires first a thorough synchronization of theoretical foundations. Accordingly, I begin with a discussion of the elephant of processualism in Sebastian Brather’s work, move then on the role of the processualist agenda in the medieval archaeology of Central Europe, and end with a brief philippic against Brather’s views of ethnicity. At the same time, however, I must add a caveat and apology to the readers of this paper. Unlike Brather’s, my own views of ethnicity have not changed much since my 2007 critique of his book⁷. The most recent presentation of those views has remained unknown to Brather, who therefore may not have captured all the nuances of my approach⁸. I will not repeat here what I wrote there, but simply note instead that while favoring Frank Siegmund in matters Frankish and Alamannic, my own understanding of the symbolism of

³ BINFORD 1972, 96.

⁴ MORELAND 2001, 16.

⁵ BIERBRAUER 2008, 6 with n. 56. Bierbrauer’s claim is not original. It goes back to EGGERS 1959, 200.

⁶ BRATHER 2004a, 175; BRATHER 2002b, 124.

⁷ CURTA 2007 [reprinted in CURTA 2009, 293–320]. It is in fact in reaction to this article that BRATHER 2011 was written. Unbeknownst to Brather, an update of my position probably appeared at the same time as his own paper (see n. 8).

⁸ CURTA 2011.

burial and the use of mortuary dress and grave goods as “metaphors” is not too far from Brather’s views of the same⁹. However, we did not arrive by the same way at that same conclusion. The trajectory followed by Sebastian Brather is worth examining, particularly in light of his recent response to my critique.

To reiterate, and despite claims to the contrary¹⁰, my founding contention was never that Brather’s rejection of “ethnic interpretations” implies a return to culture history. Instead, my overwhelming concern is that, in failing to make explicit reference to the core problem of the debate – the nature of the archaeological record and its interpretation – Brather’s critique of culture history is often little more than a different version of culture history. In a book significantly entitled *Die Archäologie der westlichen Slawen*, Brather insists that “Western Slavs” should not be understood as a return to “ethnic interpretation,” but instead as a reference to a “larger area of cultural exchange” (*ein größerer Raum kulturellen Austauschs*)¹¹. Leaving aside the nebulous character of the concept of “area of cultural exchange” onto which Brather is still firmly hanging¹², it is important to note that within one and the same book, he treated the distribution of urn cremations on top of burial mounds as a cultural trait supposedly separating western from eastern Slavs¹³. Such a contradictory juxtaposition of culture historical arguments with a critique of culture history has been duly signaled before my critique of Brather’s 2004 book¹⁴. But the problem to which that critique pointed was a fundamentally different one: within the current constellation of interlocking processualist and post-processualist theoretical underpinnings, to say, as Brather does, that archaeologists should renounce any research on ethnicity, and instead focus on economic and social structures, amounts to a purely empiricist position, the same as that supporting the Hawkesian ladder of inference. Indeed, the idea that archaeologists can study “facts,” but not “ideas” is a far more pernicious facet of modern empiricism in (medieval) archaeology than the equally widespread claim that real archaeologists do not need theory at all. For all of Brather’s painstaking efforts to distance himself from supposed accusations of Kossinnism, one cannot escape noting his inability to fend off criticism targeted at the implications of his theoretical position for the practice of medieval archaeology in Germany and elsewhere. At stake, in other words, is not a return to antiquarianism (which, despite Brather’s claims to the contrary¹⁵, I have neither feared nor mentioned in my critique of his work), but a legitimating discourse in medieval archaeology, the ultimate goal of which is to set a new agenda, at least for Germany (or the German-speaking archaeologists), if not for the discipline as a whole.

So, what of this new archaeological discourse: from where does its legitimizing power derive? Brather’s stoic defense of the idea that ethnic boundaries are “constructed” in that they are not objective strongly suggests that his critique of the “ethnic interpretations” in German archaeology is legitimized by his sterling efforts to assign archaeology the task of studying only objective reality¹⁶. According to Sebastian Brather, we see cultural traditions, but we cannot know in detail their meaning, their spiritual background, or their importance for past mental-

⁹ CURTA 2007, 540. Compare that with BRATHER 2009.

¹⁰ BRATHER 2011, 161: “Es [Brather’s views on ethnicity] drohe ein Rückfall in die überwunden geglaubte ‘kulturhistorische’ Archäologie alter Schule—ohne Beteiligung an aktuellen geisteswissenschaftlichen Debatten.“

¹¹ BRATHER 2001, 49. The very notion of an “archaeology of the (Western) Slavs“ invokes the ghosts of culture history, in both German and English. See BRATHER 2004b.

¹² BRATHER 2011, 165.

¹³ BRATHER 2001, 259: “Urnenbestattungen auf dem Hügel stellen eine mitteleuropäische Eigenentwicklung dar, die seitdem in kultureller Hinsicht West- und Ostslawen recht klar voneinander unterschied.“

¹⁴ See CURTA 2003, 282.

¹⁵ BRATHER 2011, 171. Nor have I ever claimed that economic, cultural, or social interpretations (*wirtschafts-, kultur- und sozialgeschichtliche Interpretationen*) are meaningless antiquarian endeavors (BRATHER 2011, 162).

¹⁶ Ethnicity may well be a matter of choice and cultural construction, but once in action an ethnic group operates as a type of status group, the existence of which is represented through primordial attachments. For those

ities and identities. There is no hermeneutic path to a real understanding, despite the hopes of some ‘contextual archaeologists’. Archaeology observes the frame of the context in which archaeological finds occur. At best, we get an understanding of this context¹⁷.

At a close look, Brather’s claim that “archaeology cannot apprehend and explain individuals” is remarkably similar to Lewis Binford’s fifty-year old observation that “we cannot excavate a kinship terminology or a philosophy”¹⁸. However, the New Archaeology was at least optimistic about what archaeology could achieve. Binford was convinced that “the formal structure of artifact assemblages together with the between-element contextual relationships should and do present a systematic and understandable picture of the *total extinct* cultural system” (original emphasis)¹⁹. James Deetz similarly thought that the problem was solved by placing the stress on the “essential interrelatedness of cultural systems,” which could allow archaeologists “to reach understandings of many aspects from a relative few... this certainty is at least a partial answer to the problems posed by the incompleteness of the archaeological record”²⁰. Why does Brather not share the optimism of the early generation of New Archaeology?

In his angry reply to Brather’s 2004 book, Volker Bierbrauer accused him of using “Anglo-Saxon theories” in his work²¹. Whether or not Bierbrauer thus reacted to the elephant in the room, it is worth exploring some of the basic tenets of Brather’s theoretical position. He advocates a structural and anthropological, as opposed to historical interpretation of the archaeological record²². This rings like a belated echo of Lewis Binford’s requirement that the explanation of the archaeological record be in accordance with “our current knowledge of the structural and functional characteristics of cultural systems”²³. According to him, “specific ‘historical’ explanations, if they can be demonstrated, simply explicate the mechanisms of cultural process. They add nothing to the explanation of the processes of cultural change and evolution”²⁴. In Brather’s view, an obsessive concern with ethnicity obscures other more important aspects, such as economic, social, and culture historical phenomena – all of which take place over longer periods of time, beneath the surface of events, as it were²⁵. Material culture is not directly tied to social, economic, or cultural *processes* (*Prozesse*), but instead reflects them indirectly. The direct analogue of that is the processualist claim that change happens within the entire system and not just within one of its components²⁶. And it is here, in the notion of all aspects of a culture being functionally linked to one another that we find another contradiction of Brather’s thought. The point is humorously made by Matthew Johnson: “if all parts of the universe are linked to one another... we can infer the entirety of the universe from one small piece of fairycake”²⁷. One does not therefore need to be restricted in what one talks or writes as archaeologist. In other

attachments to operate properly, ethnic boundaries must be marked in material culture items, which in and for themselves, are nothing but objective. See MALEŠEVIĆ 2004, 25.

¹⁷ BRATHER 2002a, 173. In a note, Brather illustrates his jab at “contextual archaeologists” by citing RENFREW/ZUBROW 1994 and WHITLEY 1998. Both books are illustrations of *cognitive*, but not of *contextual* archaeology.

¹⁸ BINFORD 1962, 218.

¹⁹ BINFORD 1964, 438.

²⁰ DEETZ 1972, 112.

²¹ BIERBRAUER 2004, 46.

²² BRATHER 2003, 42 (reprinted in BRATHER 2008, 149–167, at 166).

²³ BINFORD 1962, 218.

²⁴ BINFORD 1962, 217.

²⁵ BRATHER 2004a, 175.

²⁶ BINFORD 1962, 217: “Processual change in one variable can then be shown to relate to a predictable and quantifiable way to changes in other variables, the latter changing in turn relative to changes in the structure of the system as a whole.”

²⁷ JOHNSON 2010, 79.

words, if material culture reflects economic, social, or cultural processes, there is absolutely no reason to believe that it cannot reflect, albeit indirectly, social identities, including ethnicity.

Is Brather then a processualist archaeologist? Despite some clear similarities between his mode of thinking and the agenda of New Archaeology, Brather's attempt to bring cultural process into focus is neither consistent, nor explicit. This may well be a consequence of the traditional reticence towards New Archaeology among German archaeologists. As Sabine Wolfram has pointed out, until recently, the phrase "New Archaeology" was associated in Germany with everything from early processualism to the latest twist of post-processual debates²⁸. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in neighboring countries in Central Europe. In Communist Poland, Binford's studies were not only known, but also cited and used creatively for original research²⁹. The style debate in American archaeology, which has been primarily initiated in the late 1970s by James Sackett, resonated with many a Polish archaeologist³⁰. In the 1990s, processualism was still a matter of scholarly debate³¹. The Czech archaeologist Evžen Neustupný published in 1971 an article in *Antiquity*, which represents a milestone in the history of the European reception of the ideas of New Archaeology³². Process, adaptation, and systems theory are still fashionable terms in the Czech Republic³³. Some of Neustupný's students have by now applied a modified version of processualism to the analysis of early medieval sites³⁴. Whereas the prevailing interpretations of Great Moravia sought politically based explanations of social and religious change, Jiří Macháček sees both firmly based in economic behavior. In doing so, he draws inspiration from the processualist school of archaeological thought, especially from Colin Renfrew and Richard Hodges. It is important to note, however, that Macháček's is an original, "toolbox" approach to theory, and not an exclusive commitment to processualism per se. For example, by means of a sophisticated version of spatial analysis of the settlement features identified in Pohansko, he reveals the existence of an ideological concept otherwise not known from any other source. While the method is of processualist inspiration, the conclusions are a first-rate example of how symbolic archaeology (à la Ian Hodder) could be successfully applied to the study of medieval ideologies.

So, back to Sebastian Brather: is his preference for cultural process a sign of a commitment to the processualist approach? Answer: on occasion at least, yes. But unlike Macháček, Brather does not go beyond that limit and passes over in silence the major points of criticism that post-processualist archaeologists have raised since the 1980s. Like many processualists, Brather claims that archaeologists cannot "apprehend and explain individuals"³⁵. Their particular thoughts and reasons for action will supposedly remain forever unknown. This is of course a false problem. As Emile Durkheim's classical study of the suicide rate has long demonstrated, although the reasons for which individuals commit suicide vary considerable and will in many cases remain unknown, the overall rate of suicides within society as a whole rises and falls with other factors, such as the unemployment rate, the general political stability and the military situation of the country, etc.³⁶. One cannot of course predict individual suicides, but one can certainly estimate (and predict) rates and falls of the suicide rate, often quite successfully. Similarly, archaeology may not be in a position to understand the motivations behind

²⁸ WOLFRAM 2000, 183.

²⁹ SUHR 2005, 32–34.

³⁰ KOBYLÍŇSKA 1980.

³¹ MINTA-TWORZOWSKA 1996.

³² NEUSTUPNÝ 1971; NEUSTUPNÝ 1993.

³³ MACHÁČEK 2003; KUNA 2000.

³⁴ MACHÁČEK 2007 (English version in MACHÁČEK 2010).

³⁵ BRATHER 2002a, 173.

³⁶ DURKHEIM 1897. The first to use this example for archaeology was JOHNSON 2010, 87.

an individual's actions, but the archaeological record consists of the products of individual actions – pots, houses, weapons, churches, burials, and the like. It is, as Lewis Binford put it, a methodological naiveté to ignore the potential that that material has to reveal individuals in the past. As Kathleen Deagan's excavations in St. Augustine (Florida) or the excavation in the 1990s of the African Burial Ground in New York have demonstrated, we may not be able to tell what the specific circumstances were in which each and every manifestation of ethnic identity took place³⁷. Nor can we find out what was the understanding for each individual of the symbols employed for the marking of ethnic boundaries. However, Black slaves in eighteenth-century New York were buried in coffins and shrouds placed in grave pits with a west-east orientation, much like white New Yorkers. Only the presence of beads and shells, as well as heart-shaped motifs made with tacks applied to the coffin lids point to what Brather would call "cultural difference" built upon African traditions and employed to mark ethnic boundaries. Like Durkheim's suicide rate, it is the correlation between variables (in this case, African identity and elements of burial ritual) that makes ethnicity "visible," not the intentions of individuals in the past. At this point, it would seem appropriate to take issue with Brather's adoption of a processualist mode of thinking. Indeed, he does not seem to be aware that processual thinking – the search for structural or anthropological, as opposed to historical interpretations – is in fact an attempt to understand society from the outside. Brather wants to study economic, social, and cultural-historical phenomena, without noticing that those categories make sense to a twenty-first century scholar in Germany, but not necessarily to a Frank or a Slav of the early Middle Ages. According to him, "the aspects of the past reconstructed by economic, environmental, and landscape archaeology" had a lot more meaning for people living at that time than ethnic boundaries³⁸. Since archaeology cannot supposedly "apprehend" individuals, one is left wondering how does Brather actually learn about people's preferences in the past.

It is at this point that the elephant in the room becomes most dangerous. As I have pointed out in my critique of his 2004 book, there is no agency in Brather's approach³⁹. No reference exists in his work to the now abundant literature on agency and performativity in archaeology, despite Brather's claims that nobody was "just a Frank" (*einfach Franke*), and his recognition of the fact that ethnicity is about manipulation of material culture in order "to satisfy (certain) interests," and not about the material culture expression of a pre-formed identity⁴⁰. The past accessible to archaeologists – Amen: even where "ethnic identities must be couched in a broader perspective" in order to be told apart from other forms of social identity, symbols, style and power "may well be described and interpreted by means of contextual analysis." When it comes to explaining how social differences are established and maintained, however, Brather blames it all on "communication spaces and relations" (*Kommunikation[s]räumen und –verbindungen*)⁴¹. What magic has been wrought here? Which process of negotiation has transfigured description into explanation? The answer, of course, is none. Rather, Brather's processualist inclinations do not allow for any actor perspective in order to understand how change comes about. To Brather, ethnicity is not a matter of free choice: it is the elites (*die Großen*) that impose it on others and create a form of group identity⁴². This looks very much like Wenskus's *Traditionskern* (although, to be fair, Wenskus never wrote of elite imposing anything on their subjects), and

³⁷ DEAGAN 1983; BLAKEY 1995.

³⁸ BRATHER 2011, 171. According to Brather, those aspects revealed by economic, environmental, and landscape archaeology were also "identitätsrelevant." If so, why could not ethnic boundaries be marked by such means?

³⁹ CURTA 2007, 169.

⁴⁰ BRATHER 2011, 163 and 170.

⁴¹ BRATHER 2004a, 337 and 369; BRATHER 2011, 165.

⁴² BRATHER 2011, 164.

Brather simply passes over in silence Alexander Murray's devastating critique of that theory⁴³. Even if we assume, for the sake of the argument, that ethnicity was a matter of *Traditionskern(e)*, the choice of symbols cannot be arbitrary, as what symbols were chosen at what moment and by whom was always a matter of power relations. Yet, to Brather that choice is *willkürlich* in an analytical sense, because "anything could be taken as a corresponding symbol" and therefore cannot serve as general model of identification⁴⁴. Brather's "objectivity" is further betrayed by his claim that membership in any social group is based on a simplification of the "actual relations" (*Simplifizierung der tatsächlichen Verhältnisse*), which are further obscured by scholars who use the concept of "identity," because "only one and the same person could be identical to himself/herself"⁴⁵. There is a hint here to the distinction between emic and etic categories, but it is not difficult to see that to Brather group members are duped into believing that social reality is much simpler than the "actual relations." Again, the actors are denied any negotiating power on the social stage.

This conclusion is further substantiated by the close examination of one of the counter-arguments Brather employed to deflect the accusation of rejecting the link between habitus and ethnicity. In my critique of his book, while touching upon the issue of agency, I wrote the following:

For if the material culture patterning is not the result of deliberate choices inspired by a desire to mark difference, then the habitus is nothing but a cultural "norm," whose consequences are always outside the awareness of the actors and always working "behind their back." In other words, the Franks and the Alamans were different without knowing it. Such a conclusion is in direct contradiction to Brather's otherwise firm conviction that ethnicity is a matter of complex *representation* of the entire culture and of common origin, and not an *objective* combination of traits⁴⁶.

Brather's reply is worth citing in full, and in the original language, in order to avoid any confusion:

Deswegen ist es im Gegensatz zu Curtas Behauptung nicht meine "firm conviction that ethnicity is a matter of complex representation of the entire culture and of common origin" – im Gegenteil: ich halte Ethnizität sowohl für einen (eher kleinen) Bereich sozialer Repräsentation, als auch für etwas, was nichts mit gemeinsamer Herkunft zu tun hat oder haben muss. Was Curta beschreibt, sind typische Kennzeichen ethnischen *Selbstverständnisses* und seiner ordnenden, simplifizierenden Weltansicht, der die traditionelle kulturhistorische Archäologie folgt – aber gerade nicht der Regelfall von Kultur, Macht und Repräsentation⁴⁷.

For Brather, apparently, there is a distinction between internal (self-awareness) and external (categorization) definition of ethnic identity, even though he also defines identity

⁴³ MURRAY 2002, 68.

⁴⁴ BRATHER 2011, 167.

⁴⁵ BRATHER 2011, 167. This is not exactly true. The term "identity" was borrowed from mathematics and introduced into social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s to refer to the quality of being identical (or similar) to members of a group or category, and at the same time, different from members of another group or category. In other words, whether or not used to "mask" the "real" relations between members of a given society, "identity" was employed from the very beginning to describe membership in a group or category, and not to obscure that quality. See MALEŠEVIĆ 2002, 196–198; DAVIDOVIĆ 2006, 39–40 and 53.

⁴⁶ CURTA 2007, 169 (original emphasis).

⁴⁷ BRATHER 2011, 164–165 (original emphasis).

as “the awareness of social belonging” (*Identität ist das Bewusstsein sozialer Zugehörigkeit*)⁴⁸. Given that the initial argument was about ethnicity being a matter of a complex representation of material culture and of common origin, it is not difficult to see why that may not be the case: if I want to be accepted as a Greek-American, for example, it would make no sense whatsoever to sport a kilt at a wedding ceremony in a Greek-American community. Nor will it help to claim that my ancestors were Irish immigrants fleeing the famine in their homeland in the mid-nineteenth century. The only reason for which Brather insists upon the conceptual distinction between ethnicity and ethnic self-awareness is that he firmly believes the latter to be not the actor’s perspective, but a form of “false consciousness” to the extent that it involves a simplifying view of the social world. To Brather, what the individual in the past thought or desired has nothing to do with “culture, power, and representation.” Agency is thus effectively eliminated from any “objective” discussion of ethnicity. Moreover, ethnicity may be a form of social representation, but it is also “something (else)” that has apparently nothing to do with common origin.

In his response to my critique Brather made it quite clear that, according to him, ethnicity cannot be regional identity⁴⁹. With nationalism, as opposed to ethnicity, in mind, Brather believes that the latter is about large territories, even though he offers no indication of what the particular size is at which regional identity ends and ethnicity begins. Several references to early medieval polities suggest that to Brather ethnicity is the early medieval equivalent of modern nationalism, but there is no clear definition of regional identity to help with the distinction. Theoretically, at least, ethnicity can exist without the state, and regional identities may be constructed ethnically within a state. Asbjørn Engevik has recently demonstrated that *regional* boundaries and ethnic identities in southwestern Norway (Rogaland) during the fifth and sixth centuries were marked with bucket-shaped pots and cruciform brooches⁵⁰. The link between ethnicity and material culture has also been studied with a particular emphasis on frontier *regions* in nineteenth-century United States⁵¹.

Michele Hegmon has recently described American archaeologists as being tired of the fierce clashes between processualists and post-processualists which have characterized the last decade of the twentieth century. Most of them now adhere to what she called “processualism plus,” a combination of selective elements from various theoretical approaches, which is put to use for common issues⁵². The term specifically targets the current tendency to return to a more scientific approach to the archaeological record, while acknowledging the importance of inductive reasoning and adopting some of the post-processualist perspective and concepts, such as meaning, gender, and agency. By contrast, Sebastian Brather’s efforts to free the German archaeology of the Middle Ages from the ghost of Kossinna and to plant the roots of New Archaeology look more like processualism minus.

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⁴⁸ BRATHER 2011, 163.

⁴⁹ BRATHER 2011, 163 and 168.

⁵⁰ ENGEVIK 2008; ENGEVIK 2010.

⁵¹ GREENE 2011.

⁵² HEGMON 2003, 216–218. PAUKETAT 2003 has even called the approach “historical processualism” to refer to a combination of processual cultural ecology and historical particularism.

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