Chapter 1

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM AS A SIGNPOST TO NATIONAL IDENTITY
Raising Aphrodite in Cyprus

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INTRODUCTION

The modern nation-state, as developed since the nineteenth century, seeks to bind groups of people together in a geographically and culturally defined political unit in which ethnic identity is synonymous with national identity.¹ In order to nurture a sense of unity within, and loyalty to the state, the notion of the cultural distinctiveness and homogeneity of the group is fostered (Graham et al. 2000; Gellner 1987, 9, 18; Mouliou 1996, 175). Frequently, this cultural particularity is linked to, or indeed presented as the direct result of, the relationship between a people and their physical environment. In this way the land, the people and the nation-state are tied firmly together in an organic entity born of ‘nature’ and as such above and beyond question or reproach. The fact that nationalism in its ideological development equated modern state political legitimacy with group cultural antiquity means that these characteristics of distinctiveness and homogeneity must be extended into the past of the people and place, and as a result has a profound effect on the way that an archaeology embedded within state structures operates. The collective memory of the group is stimulated through symbols and commemorative events such as flags, national anthems, memorial days etc. aimed at enhancing a sense of community. Collective memory, however, is not
entirely fluid and adaptable as it is constrained to some degree by the actual historical past, i.e. the past can be ‘selectively exploited’ for ideological purposes but not entirely construed (Zerubavel 1995, 5). Thus Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ of the nation, can only be imagined because some real commonalities already existed; it is rarely, if ever, invented from scratch, as ‘imagined’ implies. I am concerned here with the problem of the transference of values, such as territoriality, nationality and continuity, from the nation state to archaeology through the mechanisms of their shared institutional bodies and as expressed in antiquities laws (Firth 1995). As Firth notes, archaeology as a discipline could conceivably question the material evidence for the state values of continuity and territoriality, but is unlikely to do so when operating within state institutions (ibid. 52); to question the prior existence of such values is to question the legitimacy of the state itself.

These values are of such importance because, frequently, the international acceptance of the territorial and political integrity of a state is strengthened with the common acceptance of the ethnic/cultural unity of the group, traceable temporally in a given geographical territory. As a result, archaeology, history and the past in general are invested with especial significance by the state as the tools which can best provide the necessary evidence of homogeneity and continuity in culture and identity through time. Archaeology and the past are thus ideally placed for the provision and shaping of the narratives and symbols which will henceforth identify and represent the nation-state. Group collective memory and sense of community is then ‘activated and articulated’ by and through these narratives and symbols (Liakos 2001, 28).

This archaeological underpinning of ideological national narratives characterises in particular the relationship between the nation-state and archaeology in the early days of the state, or in states where continued pressure on territorial borders from outside powers insists upon strong internal unity and solidarity. I propose that in states which are well established and lack such urgency for internal cohesion, these ideological functions are often superseded, or at least matched, on another level by financial imperatives with an equally potent impact on local archaeology. In this situation, archaeology, or the offspring of archaeological activity, now managed by state controlled agencies, becomes central to the economic prosperity of the state by virtue of the important role played by the ‘heritage industry’ in modern tourism (Urry 1990). For many nations, both developing and developed, economic solvency is as immediate a