14
Archaeology to the Lay Public in Brazil: Three Experiences

Pedro Paulo A. Funari, Nanci Vieira de Oliveira, and Elizabete Tamanini

14.1. Introduction

In Latin America, there is a lack of dialogue and cooperation between archaeologists and the lay public (cf. Gnecco, 1995), though there is a growing body of evidence that this is changing, with an increasing number of archaeologists ready to engage in active community action (cf. Noelli, 1994, 1995, 1996a,b,c; Funari, 2001). For several decades, archaeologists have not been concerned with a wider audience and often a technical jargon has made it difficult for nonarchaeologists to be able to understand archaeological publications. However, several archaeologists now regard public archaeology, particularly addressing the lay public, as an essential part of their social responsibility (Mazel and Stewart, 1987: 169). Furthermore, archaeology can play a meaningful role in showing diversity, showing poverty in the past, celebrating ordinary architecture, walls that are dirty rather than clean. This way, ordinary people can recognize themselves in the archaeological discourse, using thus the past to create alternative texts for the present (Hall, 1994: 182). Public archaeology is understood in this chapter as all the public aspects of archaeology, including such topics as archaeological policies, education, politics, religion, ethnicity and archaeology, public involvement in archaeology (Ascherson, 1999). The contextual epistemological approach, since the 1980s, has opened the way for a growing interest in archaeological theory and practice for the interaction with ordinary people and communities (Funari et al., 2005). There are a variety of lay public audiences and this paper attempts to address this diversity by presenting three different experiences from Brazil (for an overview of the subject, cf. Funari, 2004).

Brazil is a vast country, as big as the lower contiguous continental US and so we have chosen three different areas and a variety of lay audiences. We deal with an ethnic/political movement and the media in the case of a seventeenth-century runaway slave settlement, with squatters and school children physically close to prehistoric shell middens and with the relatives of missing people excavated by the archaeologist in clandestine cemeteries.
Though each case study is unique, there are common threads that serve to aid archaeologists in dealing with lay audiences.

14.2. The Audiences Interested in the Archaeology of Runaway Settlers, or Maroons

In the beginning of the seventeenth century a large runaway polity was established in the backlands of northeastern Brazil, enduring over the whole of the seventeenth century (Figures 14.1 and 14.2). It became known as Palmares, or the land of the Palm trees, in Portuguese (Orser, 1996, with earlier references in English). The inhabitants themselves referred to the polity as “Angola Janga” (Little Angola). This enduring freedom experience lasted until 1694, when slave-hunters destroyed the maroon (Funari, 1999a, with earlier references in English). Archaeological field research conducted in 1992 and 1993 by a joint American and Brazilian team identified the largest settlement, the capital of the polity, where 14 sites were located (Funari, 1991; Orser, 1992, 1993). Black movement activists had used this settlement since the 1970s, when they proposed the 20th of November, the day the last leader of the maroon, Zumbi, was killed, as a Black awareness day (Funari, 1996a). The top of the hill where the settlers had chosen to construct their capital, produced a lot of surface material, enabling the Black Movement to identify it as a powerful symbol of Black fight against oppression. Although the site, known as Serra da Barriga (or Potbelly hill), was a powerful symbol

![Figure 14.1. Map of Palmares in the state of Alagoas, Brazil. (After Funari, 1999a: 312.)](image-url)