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Anthro 2020

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April 27th, 2023

Analysis Through Elliot's Matrix

The Elliot Matrix is a valuable tool used in the analysis of archaeological artifacts. "The procedure is meant to encourage the researcher to examine the artifact more closely for observable data before relying on documentary sources." (Elliot 119) The Elliot Matrix was developed to help historians discard preconceived notions about the artifacts they are studying. (Elliot 115) I chose to use this system, because it seemed easiest based on the information I needed. However, like any analytical method, the Elliot system has both strengths and weaknesses that must be considered when analyzing archaeological artifacts. The strengths and weaknesses of the Elliot system will be analyzed through the evaluation of a black brooch recovered from a grave in the Saxon cemetery on Andrew's hill at Easington, Co. Durham.

The Elliot system has many strengths that make it a good system of analysis. One of the strengths of the Elliot system is its ability to encourage the researchers to closely analyze the artifact. (Elliot 117) By examining the physical attributes of an artifact, such as its size, shape, material, potential uses, and cultural and historical context, a person can get a much deeper understanding of past social and economic systems. Another strength of the Elliot system is its ability to consider the context in which an object was used. By examining the context in which an artifact was found, including its location and similar artifacts, this system can help uncover vital information needed for archaeological sites. Elliot suggests that "the secret to gaining as much information as possible from an artifact rests in the interdisciplinary nature of material

history studies and the observational powers of the examiner.” (Elliot 119) By using these multiple sources of evidence, more information about artifacts and sites can be gathered quicker. The Elliot system appears to be a more object-focused approach of analysis. However, although the strengths of the Elliot system are significant, it is important to also consider its weaknesses in order to fully understand its limitations and potential limitations.

Despite its many strengths, the Elliot system has some limitations that must be considered when analyzing artifacts. First, the interpretation of an object can be very subjective and dependent on the person conducting it. Factors such as personal experience, cultural background, and prejudice can affect how accurately a person can fill out an Elliot table. Second, the Elliot system can be challenging to use when trying to interpret the context of an object. This is especially true if an object has been removed from its original context and moved elsewhere. Similarly, using the Elliot method allows for deductive reasoning to make interpretations and draw conclusions about artifacts. This can lead to someone making incorrect assumptions on artifacts. Lastly, another weakness of the Elliot system is that it is very limited. Since it primarily focuses on physical and visual characteristics of an artifact, the Elliot system can lead to narrow understandings of artifacts that may not fully reflect their history. The Elliot system has several strengths and weaknesses, but it remains a valuable tool for artifact analysis.

While analyzing the brooch, I was also thinking of ways the Elliot system can be used for my group project. A way that my group can use the system for our project is by analyzing our materials. In order to know how our ax head was used, it is important to understand the materials available to the people who used it. Considering factors such as where certain materials can be found and how they were used can give us insight into the cultural significance of the materials used and how it might have affected their ax-making. Similarly, the Elliot system can help my

group further analyze the markings on our tool. Our stone ax has visible surface markings that can provide valuable insights into how it was used and why this type of stone was chosen for the ax.

During my time completing an Elliot table for the black brooch, I was paying attention to the things I found both easy and difficult about the Elliot system. One thing I noticed was that it was easier to use when I was in class. I think this is because in class I was able to hold the artifact in my hand, but here I was not. To me, this seemed like a huge weakness of the Elliot method because it appeared to require a more hands-on approach. I decided to not include this in the weaknesses of the system because I think the image in the book was also at fault. Overall, I think the Elliot system can be very beneficial to archaeologists everywhere. Although there are weaknesses to the system, I still think it is very valuable. After our lab and our midterm, I have come to the conclusion that both the FOCUS system and the Elliot system are very valuable to analyze objects. However, when used together the two are even more powerful.

Works Cited

Elliot, R., et al. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. Edited by Susan Pearce, 1st ed., Routledge, 1994. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203428276>