

Anastasia Christophilopoulou, ed. *Material Cultures in Public Engagement: Re-inventing Public Archaeology within Museum Collections* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2020, 168pp., b/w and colour illustr., pbk, ISBN 9781789253689)

The book *Material Cultures in Public Engagement: Re-inventing Public Archaeology within Museum Collections* is an edited volume that searches for common grounds between the fields of archaeology, material culture, and public engagement. It explores how these fields interact, inform one another, and establish some relevance for different audiences through practices shared by museum and public engagement professionals. This book is the result of the conference 'Material Cultures in Public Engagement' that took place in Cambridge in 2015 and devised an agenda for making the past less of a foreign country for the public.

The book is organized in four main parts with twelve chapters in total, which are discussed in detail below. Part A sets out the theoretical framework of public archaeology initiatives in museum spaces. Part B discusses applied approaches of public engagement in museums and archaeological sites. Part C touches upon learning and education through curatorial practices. Part D articulates an intersection between archaeology, museums, and public engagement.

The case studies presented come from Greece (The National Archaeological Museum and The New Acropolis Museum in Athens, as well as two public archaeology initiatives), Germany (Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Neues Museum in Berlin), the United Kingdom (The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the Museum of Classical Archaeology (MOCA) in Cambridge). The variety of these case studies is indicative of the diversity encountered in public engagement programs in

European institutions, which consequently demonstrates the lack of a coherent framework within which public archaeology and public engagement programs operate and materialize in different contexts.

Part A is the introductory chapter by Anastasia Christophilopoulou and Lucilla Burn. It offers an extensive review of the history and development of public archaeology, as both a theoretical and practical sub-division of archaeology attempting to develop a definition of the term, mainly focusing on practices in the USA and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, this chapter illuminates the parameters that govern the development of public archaeology in other European countries, such as Germany, Italy, and Greece, namely the state's involvement in archaeological practice, the way state museums are managed, and the rigid archaeological law that pertains to public participation in museums and heritage. Inevitably, comparative discourses are developed that demonstrate the consequences of disregarding accessibility and alienating the public from participating in archaeological and heritage practices. Nevertheless, the case studies under scrutiny show how, despite the lack of changes in the national archaeological legislations and in the relationship between Archaeology and the State, museums can offer successful examples of a paradigm shift when it comes to public engagement. This shift, however, is mainly discussed as a top-down approach, irrespective of ongoing changes in curatorial practice in the field of public engagement (Stylianou-Lambert, 2010; Golding & Modest, 2013).

This shift brings to the fore the challenge curators and museum professionals

face to develop new practices, applications, and methods that will both reflect and respect their collections, while motivating and inspiring diverse visitors and audiences. Hence, the questions that prevail are how can progress in the relationship between museums and their 'complex' audiences be ensured, as well as how can museums integrate social participation and public engagement practices into their core operations instead of treating them as a mere 'add-on' to their traditional activities.

Drawing on all the above, Part B (Chapters 2–7) of the volume offers a broad survey of public engagement initiatives in museums and archaeological sites based on selected case studies. Chapter 2 in this section, by Eleftheriou, Lembidaki and Kaimara, discusses public engagement through the restoration works of the Athenian Acropolis and their vast Documentation Archive. The study illustrates how public engagement can be ensured through the reinforcement of the relationship between audiences and the Archive. Yet, no matter how rich the awareness actions presented here are, especially when facing the difficulty of having to communicate a Documentation Archive to the public, it seems that some of these activities cannot overcome their top-down nature as they are either designed for the more informed or academic audiences, or they invite different audience segments to participate in activities that are already designed by experts.

Chapter 3, by Bertram, discusses the redesigning of the exhibition of the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (the Museum of Prehistory) in Berlin, a traditional museum that attempts to develop non-traditional approaches to public engagement. Although much of the text is dedicated to the extensive reconstruction and restoration works done for the museum to be housed on the

Museuminsel in the Neues Museum (2009), there is no indication as to whether public and/or community involvement approaches were incorporated in the design phase from early on. It is only at the end of the article that the author mentions the use of educational material for the interpretation of the museum collections, namely dioramas, computer animation, film production, and a time-lapse. These, however, do not go beyond the passive communication of information from the transmitter (the museum, its curators) to the receiver (the public, the varied audiences) and act mainly instructively.

Chapter 4, by Joy and Harknett, concerns the 'Cambridge Wall' exhibited in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) in Cambridge, a complicated display about archaeological stratigraphy and geographical location, for the interpretation of which a digital app was developed in 2014. The authors offer a very thorough evaluation of the app discussing whether it successfully managed to engage the public. Albeit innovative, the app appears to be rather a means of providing more information about the exhibit than an actual tool that will actively engage visitors in its interpretation in a participatory manner. The authors rightly conclude that the act of informing is different from engaging, and therefore museum technologies must go beyond imparting information and instead be used as tools for active engagement.

Klonizaki, in Chapter 5, introduces music and concerts within museums, as a means of public engagement. She discusses the Morning Concerts that took place in 2014 at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens and succeeded in attracting varied audiences, senior citizens, tourists, museum goers etc. The author presents a sensory way of coming closer to the past, which is in tune with the democratic character of the Museum and can

successfully attract even non-visitors. However, this seems to be yet another case of public outreach rather than an active public engagement program, that would energetically connect audiences with the museum's collections, instead of them being just the stage set of the concerts.

In Chapter 6, James presents a sample of five temporary archaeological exhibitions in different European museums discussing approaches to interpretation. The author interestingly builds his arguments around five interpretive axes, namely Science, Guidance, Dream, Shock, and Engagement, one for each of the five exhibitions under examination here. Although the article critically discusses exhibition design and explores in depth the museological rationale behind the particular museum displays, it yet again offers a top-down approach, from the expert to the public, and it is not clear whether or not public engagement was incorporated from early on as a goal in these ventures. In essence, it is not clear if there was strategic planning on public engagement, and if so, to what extent it helped communities gain better control of the creation of knowledge encapsulated in the newly designed exhibitions (Anagnostopoulos et al., [forthcoming](#)).

Galanidou in Chapter 7, the last one in Part B of the book, gives an extensive and thorough review of the development of the discipline of archaeology and, later, of public archaeology in Greece, from the perspective of the official Archaeological Service and the Greek universities. The author rightly points out that public archaeology in Greece was until very recently restricted to simply providing information and disseminating scientific archaeological knowledge from the expert to the non-expert. Galanidou then presents two case studies, a university excavation at Lisvori-Rodafnidia on Lesbos, and Diazoma, a non-profit, non-governmental

association for the preservation of Ancient Greek theatres. Although these case studies are discussed as good practices in public engagement, it is evident that they once more work on a top-down approach, as they raise awareness and invite the public to see and attend or to listen and touch, but there is no mention of any co-curation and co-design approaches, or bottom-up participatory actions built around these archaeological projects.

Part C is dedicated to audience and community driven engagement within museums. Chapter 8, by Nomikou, discusses a three-step approach to public engagement in museums, aiming at more participatory practices that can lead to a heightened visibility of the public within museum spaces. However, the examples at the core of this article derive from the exhibits of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford, which are based on a study that took place over a decade ago, and the author rightfully recognizes that a lot of new ground has been covered when it comes to rendering the public visible in curatorial exhibition practices since the study was originally conducted.

In Chapter 9, Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, Kalessopoulou, Koutsiana, and Tselekos discuss educational approaches in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Greece, a traditional museum with all the fundamental characteristics of a national institution. The authors analyze the implementation of modern museum educational approaches that are not object-centered nor teacher-centred but are instead based on role play, storytelling, puppet theatre, arts and crafts, music and dance, etc. Moreover, they discuss educational programs catering for people with disabilities and for special audiences. Undoubtedly, a national establishment such as the National Archaeological Museum appears here to have gone beyond its traditional frameworks through the implementation of innovative

educational methods. Yet, it is not clear if the interpretive frameworks promoted by the museum educators are equally innovative or if they still reproduce traditional museum narratives through more progressive means and methodological tools.

Chapter 10, by Christophilopoulou, examines the implementation of sensory practices in public engagement projects by museum curators and the challenges faced. The author presents two case studies from the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, focusing on blind and partially sighted audiences, and on sensory approaches to material culture through virtual reality. Both case studies are extremely interesting examples of museum practice, as they manage to transmit the physicality of the past through the senses. However, a top-down design prevails once again, since there is no mention of methodologies that would require participation of or consultation with members of the different audience segments addressed by these specific programs.

In Chapter 11, the last chapter of Part C, Thornber discusses the educational approaches in the collection of plaster casts of the Museum of Classical Archaeology (MOCA) in Cambridge as a means of public engagement. Thornber interestingly plays with the distinction between the authentic and the fake and discusses the challenges of attracting and engaging visitors with a collection that is comprised entirely of artifacts which are not originals. The author emphasizes the notions of participation, creativity, imagination, and inspiration, not only for children but also for adult audiences through two tailor-made programs designed to create meaningful museum experiences. Even though the barrier between the 'non-authentic' and the public seems to have been dissolved through these pioneering approaches of the MOCA, it still appears as if the voices of the audience were not meant to be included in the design phase.

The book concludes in Part D with Chapter 12, by Osborne. In his concluding remarks, the author seeks to create a meaningful discourse between archaeology, museums, and public engagement. He recognizes the difficulty as well as the necessity of defining one's public, he discusses the challenges of achieving meaningful public engagement, and he acknowledges the fact that even the most innovative approaches cannot guarantee engagement, if this is not incorporated in the initial design stages as an inherent goal, so that audiences are obliged to take an active role as museum visitors.

Overall, the diverse case studies of this volume, despite its narrow geographical focus, make it pivotal to the study of the relationship between museums and public engagement, especially because the book demonstrates that audience/public engagement now constitutes an important aspect of the strategic planning of cultural organizations worldwide, even though the majority of them fail to move beyond the logic of outreach from the institution to the public and to turn their scope to increased public participation from the early stages of exhibition design. Although public engagement is extensively discussed in this volume, this is achieved mainly through top-down approaches, from the experts to the audience, while discussion of bottom-up initiatives and community-bound projects remains limited. The notion of community is certainly difficult to define because community as a contingency is not always synonymous with homogeneity: it contains various subgroups and subcommunities, diverse segments with numerous voices, different demands, and conflicts, it does not necessarily occupy one geographical space, it can be dispersed, diverse, or even a cyber-community. However, community engagement is a key parameter to museum and heritage practices, if professionals and cultural institutions aim to make an impact

to the societies that surround them. To conclude, this edited volume will be a very interesting and meaningful read to area specialists, advanced students, and scholars who are involved in the field of museums, archaeology, culture, and the heritage sector, illustrating the ways in which universal methodologies of public engagement are applied in specific contexts, and communicating the diverse intersections between museum and heritage experts and the public.

### REFERENCES

Anagnostopoulos, A., Kyriakidis, E., & Stefanou, E. forthcoming. *Making Heritage Together: Archaeological Ethnography and*

*Community Engagement in Rural Places*. London: Routledge.

Golding, V., & Modest, W., eds. 2013. *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*. Bloomsbury: London & New York.

Stylianou-Lambert, Th. 2010. Re-conceptualizing Museum Audiences: Power, Activity, Responsibility. *Visitor Studies*, 13(2): 130–144. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10645578.2010.509693>

ELENI STEFANO

*Hellenic Open University,*

*The Heritage Management Organization,*  
*Greece*

doi:10.1017/ea.2021.41

Elizabeth Weiss and James W. Springer. *Repatriation and Erasing the Past* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020, xii and 265pp., 24 figs, 5 tables, hbk, ISBN 9781683401575, pdf ISBN 9781683401858)

On December 18, 2020, the University of Florida Press sent a memorandum in an email to its publishing partners, including authors (such as I) who have published in the Press. The memo was an apology for ‘the pain this publication has caused. It was not our intent to publish a book that uses arguments and terminology associated with scientific racism’ (Gutierrez, 2020: 1). However, the Press noted that ‘to withdraw the publication at this point, as some have called for on social media and in other forums, is to attempt to hide it and to hope that simply retracting the book will cause the viewpoint to cease to exist.’

What is the furor about? The title of Weiss and Springer’s volume gives an immediate indication of their perspective—that the act of repatriating Native American human remains to Native

American groups as required by federal law is ‘erasing’ an undefined ‘past’ from an amorphous temporality. This is not Weiss’ first anti-repatriation book (see Weiss, 2008), and those readers who are aware of Weiss’ anti-repatriation focus will not be surprised with this new volume.

The first six pages of the book (seven pages if one reads the footnotes) serve as an expanded outline of everything that follows. The volume is full of arguments about the evils of repatriation, defined by the authors as ‘any ideology, political movement, or law that attempts to control anthropological research by giving control over that research to contemporary American Indian communities’ (p. 6). The authors show deference to the scientific method at the expense of all things ‘not-science’, and seem more concerned that