

## Book Reviews

John F. Cherry and Felipe Rojas, eds. *Archaeology for the People* (Joukowsky Institute Publication 7. Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015, 170 pp., 29 figs., 3 tables, ISBN 978-1-78570-170-8)

This book inevitably catches one's eye. As soon as I came across it, the cover made me remember things. On the one hand, its title, *Archaeology for the People*, immediately made me think of an influential album for my generation, *Automatic for the People*, released in 1992 by the legendary band REM. On the other hand, the cover design also brought to mind the revolution propaganda posters from the 1930s and 1940s. Therefore, at first sight one might think that this book offers a new theoretical take on Marxist archaeology in the twenty-first century, or that it is a product of the Latin American social archaeology school of thought. The demand for an archaeology for the people is an obvious maxim for the more conscientious branch of community archaeology, that which makes archaeologists become activists. This trend correlates socio-politically with the birth of popular movements, such as *Podemos* in Spain, which are demanding that *the people* be the focus of all political matters.

These prejudices rapidly disappeared as soon as I began reading. *Archaeology for the People* has nothing to do with the above. It is much more provocative, close to irreverent even in the current state of affairs. In the twenty-first century, in a globalised world marked by social media, short-worded messages, images, and immediacy, we come across two archaeologists from the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World (Brown University, USA), John F. Cherry and Felipe Rojas,

who advocate nothing less than the need to create interesting accounts and stories about the past. They have no intention of unearthing the narrativist historiography of the late twentieth century, but only ask that writing be used as a tool to bring archaeology closer to the people.

We archaeologists enjoy a privileged position; our job is to research the past and we have incredibly powerful material to create suggestive and evocative stories. The general public is strongly attracted to the work of archaeologists (Holtorf, 2005). However, many people prefer learning about the past with the help of novels, films, YouTube videos, and comics rather than sitting down to read the immense amount of incomprehensible academic reports and dissertations. In this respect, traditional archaeological literature will never be able to compete in terms of audience with historical novels and films. 'People don't want to hear about fibulas, they want more than just objects, they want to bring the past to life. People want to hear about people' (Jaekel, 2012: 81–82). This was how Birgit Jaekel—an archaeologist with a PhD from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany)—opened her speech at the *Integrating Archaeology* conference held in Frankfurt am Main in 2012. In 2007, she published a novel, *Die Druidin*, which became a bestseller and brought her academic life 'to an end', as she commented ironically. This book was followed by others, and these well-written and well-researched books have helped

many German readers become more familiar with their prehistory and proto-history.

Cherry and Rojas share the analysis made by Jaeckel and other colleagues in recent years (González-Ruibal, 2006) and stress the importance of telling enthralling archaeological stories that talk about people to the people. They want to humanise the past. In 2013, with this in mind, they organised an intriguing competition, the Joukowski Institute Competition for Accessible Archaeological Writing. Anyone could participate, provided they told a story about archaeology in fewer than 6,000 words, accompanied by a single illustration and with no bibliographic references or notes of any sort. The monetary prize was 5,000 US dollars. The scientific prize was the publication of the text in the book here reviewed. The prize-winning article was published with five runners-up (which are to be found in Chs 4–8).

However, *Archaeology for the People* is much more than a medium for a writing competition. It is, above all, an honest book, as demonstrated in the introduction where Cherry and Rojas, in the same vein as Jaeckel, ponder over what has become of the narrative style used in the great classics of quality dissemination of archaeology (Ceram, Fagan, Pryor, etc.). The current situation gives plenty of reasons to succumb to nostalgia. The absolute prioritisation of the scientific approach has marginalised all sorts of audiences. For instance, dissemination and outreach comprise only a very insignificant part of academic curriculae throughout most of continental Europe. This gap left by archaeologists has been filled in by novelists and journalists at best, and by fantastical archaeology and pseudoscience enthusiasts at worst. The editors' diagnosis, therefore, is correct and they have thought up an interesting initiative to help address the deficiency. Inspired by the science sections in US newspapers and

magazines, they announced the aforementioned competition. In so doing, they established certain criteria that they themselves deemed insufficient. In fact, they anticipated future criticism in reviews like this one, pointing out questionable aspects of their initiative such as the non-admission of blog posts and articles not written in English, and the composition of the jury panel, which consisted entirely of postdoctoral fellows at the Joukowski Institute.

Continuing in this honest vein, the editors include an article in Chapter 2 that they consider a model or inspiration for the competition participants. 'The Sanctuary: The World's Oldest Temple and the Dawn of Civilization', written by Elif Batuman, was originally published in *The New Yorker Magazine* in 2011. It explains in an entertaining manner the excavation carried out at the Turkish site of Göbekli Tepe. Using a lively journalistic style, Batuman tells a story that combines personal anecdotes from his travels with the testimonies of Kurdish workers at the excavation, displaying an in-depth knowledge of the archaeological discussions concerning the origins of monumentality in the transition to the Neolithic. Naturally, Batuman uses an unbeatable, effective, and sensationalist headline. This is the key to success shared by the remarkable articles in *National Geographic* and influential editors of archaeology and heritage blogs with thousands of online followers—a lesson that has been very well learnt by the authors of the following chapters.

All six articles included in *Archaeology for the People* are good from a stylistic viewpoint but, ironically, are even better not for *how* the stories are told, but *because* of the stories that are told. This book is, therefore, an appropriate reading for anyone interested in working in archaeology because the different case studies demonstrate, with no beating about the bush, the relationships between archaeology, politics,

identity, nationalism, and colonialism. Each of these stories talks about the different empowerment processes undergone by very diverse local communities and which, inevitably, trigger heritage conflicts. In the winning article, 'The Archaeology of Sustenance: The Endangered Market Gardens of Istanbul' (Ch. 3), Chantel White, Aleksandar Shopov, and Marta Ostovich spotlight the urban landscape created by members of the Slavic-speaking minority in Istanbul with their development of gardens and vegetable plots. Behind this seemingly innocuous botanical history of ancient Constantinople lie the traumatic pogroms and expulsions that took place in the 1950s. Not only did exile lead to the obliteration of a sustainable urban agricultural system and manifestation of intangible world heritage, it also left the land exposed to urban speculation and the neoliberal depredation of a neglected but ancient cultural landscape.

In 'The Quest: Who Were the First Americans?' (Ch. 4), Chip Colwell, after reclaiming the figure of black cowboy and amateur archaeologist George McJunkin, summarises to perfection the heated debate concerning the first human colonisation of the American continent. Who were the first Americans? As he attempts to answer this question, the author manages to captivate the reader, making accessible an episode of prehistory which, outside this book, tends to be saturated with too many Clovis spearheads, tedious historiographical discussions, and quarrels between specialists. Colwell, however, manages to bring out the human side of these prehistorians and conveys the enthusiasm of rigorous and passionate researchers who work to get closer to the truth.

In the following chapter, 'Remembering Slack Farm' (Ch. 5), Gwynn Henderson scrutinises one of the most shocking cases of looting in the USA, which took place

in 1987 at the site of Slack Farm in Kentucky. Through his account of moving personal memories and his professional and emotional connection to the site, we learn first-hand about numerous realities and processes: the impact of antiquities trafficking, the impunity that has existed up until now, the importance of volunteers in the campaigns to recover and protect heritage, and the empowerment of native communities. The Slack Farm affair contributed enormously to the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

'Pot Biographies and Plunder' (Ch. 6), by Vernon Silver, draws attention to the repatriation procedures of looted heritage and the dark relationships between antiquities trafficking, auction houses, and museums. He exemplifies this with the case of the Greek vase stolen from an Etruscan tomb and returned to Italy in the 1970s. The story is intriguingly told in the style of a detective investigation, following the trail of the object from its theft to its return. As the author points out, this dark past is often a fundamental trait of the social biography of archaeological objects, and he goes much deeper than the hackneyed question 'Who owns objects?' (Robson et al., 2006). His focus on the link between nationalism-patriotism and archaeological objects with a high symbolic value, in the vein of Hamilakis's well-known works on ancient Greek heritage (Hamilakis, 2003), is also noteworthy.

In 'The Decline of the Classic Maya City' (Ch. 7), Keith Eppich gives us what I consider to be the article with the highest literary value of the whole book. His magnificent prose firstly immerses the reader in the humid and hostile atmosphere of the jungle, and secondly conjures up the stories of discovery of lost cities that are told in Ceram's legendary book *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* (1951). At the

same time, the author connects past and present and through his interpretation of the Maya collapse reminds us of the pressing need for ecological balance and sustainable agriculture.

The best article of the competition selection is, in my opinion, 'Digging Deep: A Hauntology of Cape Town' (Ch. 8). Nick Shepherd provides an excellent lesson on archaeological heritage management in Cape Town during the post-apartheid period. The excavation of a necropolis brings to the surface all kinds of ghosts from the past that, due to the intervention of politicians, religious leaders, and grass-roots organisations, have now been restored and revived. As the author rightly points out, 'It is characteristic both of this era and of the state of the discipline that some of the most politically contested contexts of contemporary archaeological practice are concerned with repatriation and restitution of human remains' (pp. 100–01). The exposure of the dead at Prestwich Street in the world of the living unleashed memorialization processes that, in many cases, questioned the authority of scientific knowledge embodied by professional archaeologists.

Chapter 9 ('Photo Essay: Eating in Uronarti', by Laurel Bestock) is, quite frankly, dispensable and as I see it, completely out of place. It is a photo essay on archaeological works carried out in North Sudan and clashes with the general mood of the book.

In my opinion, the book should have ended here with a necessary concluding chapter. However, the editors decided to introduce, somewhat forced perhaps, two additional sections. The first (Ch. 10, 'Who Are the People?', by Susan E. Alcock and colleagues) analyses the results of a project developed at the heart of Joukowsky Institute: the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) named *Archaeology's Dirty Little*

*Secrets*. The second section and final chapter in the book ('Responses to the *Archaeology for the People* Questionnaire') presents the answers to a questionnaire that was distributed among various internationally renowned archaeologists and communicators. I think that today there are many other—more efficient, simpler, and faster—ways of carrying out this sort of idea exchange. That being said, this appendix allows the reader to enquire a little into the works that triggered the archaeological vocation of a number of today's great thinkers.

With the exception of this last part, which is out of balance with the final result, *Archaeology for the People* is a useful and important volume that contains thought-provoking stories about a controversial past that is often deliberately ignored, including by many archaeologists secluded in the ivory tower of academia. Books like this one prevent the past from becoming an *Ignoreland*, to cite the title of a critical and mordant track included in REM's album *Automatic for the People*.

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Elizabeth Pierce, Anthony Russell, Adrián Maldonado and Louisa Campbell, eds. *Creating Material Worlds: The Uses of Identity in Archaeology* (Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2016, ix and 246 pp., 47 b/w figs., pbk, ISBN 978-1-78570-180-1)

The dramatic political events of 2016 and the current year so far demonstrate in a striking fashion that identity is far from being a redundant theme in either public debate or the social sciences. Whether we consider the victory for the Leave campaign in the UK's referendum on EU membership, the increasing prominence of related nationalist/Eurosceptic movements across the Continent, the election defeat of Hillary Clinton in the US, or a host of other developments around the world, the politics of identity are deeply entangled in all of these situations. While many analysts seek to explain these recent events in terms of economic inequality and/or the consequences of globalization, or more subtle effects of age-group and educational demographics, for example, the more overt language of identification is clearly important as a central part of the discourses many of the new populists—and their opponents—deploy, and its significance is likely to be deeper than that too. This volume of papers dealing with identity and its place in contemporary archaeology is therefore timely and welcome, seeking as it does to integrate several new theoretical strands into more traditional approaches to the archaeology of identity. If it has perhaps been somewhat overtaken by events that is hardly a matter for criticism. What does need to be considered in this

review, though, is how the approaches to identity aired in this volume provide both fruitful insight into past social dynamics and how they might benefit archaeology in its inevitable future engagement with identity politics. For, given the strong connection between earlier generations of archaeologists and colonial and national movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we must be alert and prepared for the likelihood that a new wave of nationalist politics will seek to draw upon highly partial constructions of past identities. In short, we must learn from our own past and be better equipped, theoretically and empirically, to challenge ethnocentric and other divisive narratives of identity that will be—indeed, already are being—aired from political pulpits.

One exciting thing about this volume is that it arises out of informal collaborations between early career researchers, with most contributors having been research students at the University of Glasgow. That institution deserves credit not only for encouraging a creative atmosphere but more specifically providing financial support for the initiative of organizing a lecture series, workshop, and publication to develop these themes, with some participants from other universities joining the roster of volume contributors. While the locational origins of the project lead to a