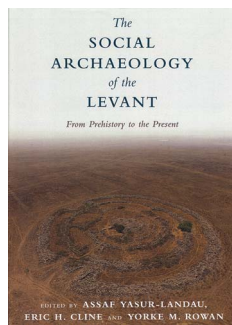


ASSAF YASUR-LANDAU, ERIC H. CLINE & YORKE M. ROWAN (ed.). *The social archaeology of the Levant: from prehistory to the present*. 2019. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 978-1-107-15668-5 £110.



At a total of 33 chapters spanning the Palaeolithic (Chapters 1–3) through to the Post-Antique (Chapters 24–26), and discussing topics from comingled remains (Chapter 11) to object biographies (Chapter 32), *The social archaeology of the Levant* is an ambitious volume,

aiming “to present research that connects analytical data to the lives of ancient people through the use of theoretical frameworks” (p. 3). Taking their inspiration from Tom Levy’s (1998) *The archaeology of society in the Holy Land*, now over 20 years old, the editors have identified a key gap in the current literature on this region and have brought together a series of contributions that reflect a multitude of ways in which ancient Levantine societies can be engaged with and analysed.

As the editors acknowledge in the prologue, the title is somewhat misleading as the volume is predominately focused on the southern Levant. The many contributions to this book, however, reflect the re-orientations that have occurred more widely in Levantine archaeology, addressing themes such as gender, agency and post-colonial theory; as a result, the volume attains one of its key goals. There are, however, different levels of engagement with these ideas within the volume, and for a book that places ‘social archaeology’ at the centre of its discussions, it is slightly awkward that papers on themes such as gender theory in biblical archaeology (Chapter 28) and archaeology and the public (Chapter 33) are consigned to the last two sections of the volume. Although organised broadly chronologically, and by theme, I would have preferred to see these theory chapters at the forefront of the book. Their placement at the end relegates them to something almost akin to appendices, rather than allowing them to inform the reading of the volume with their discussions. This is not, however, to downplay the very worthwhile discussions throughout the rest of the volume. In addition to a selection of broad and up-to-date overviews, which will no doubt be useful for anyone teaching courses on southern Levantine archaeology, there are a number

of chapters that stand out in terms of their overall content and approach.

Several useful review chapters emphasise the thorny issues of biblical archaeology and ethnicity (e.g. Ilan, Chapter 15), and while not necessarily presenting new data or hypotheses, provide an up-to-date summary of the archaeological evidence and remind us to be cognisant of existing historical biases and narratives, as well as the ways in which new data (for example, updated radiocarbon dates) or new theoretical debates can, and should, be brought to bear on these subjects. Meanwhile, Höfmayr and Streit’s (Chapter 31) emphasis on the need to place the ‘when’ back into social archaeological dialogues is a necessary reminder of the importance of secure dating frameworks. Perhaps one of the most engaging chapters of the volume, which critically tackles gender and biblical archaeology, is that by Bodin (Chapter 28). This highlights the many pitfalls of so-called ‘apologetic’ feminist analyses (pp. 530–32).

One of the key achievements of the volume is the focus on not only pan-regional patterns, but also local and sub-regional variations. Chapter 4 (Finlayson), for example, stresses the idea that there is “no single, uniform, Neolithic across Southwest Asia, rather a series of regional expressions” (p. 74), a concept that is worth emphasising, especially within undergraduate teaching. At a broader scale, a substantial number of the chapters explore the effects of empire on this region; these highlight the complex socio-religious and cultural make-up of this region, which can be all too easily whitewashed. Refreshingly, however, many chapters in this volume explore the multiplicity of relationships and forms of interaction that may have existed between communities within the southern Levant and foreign external powers. Chapters on these topics emphasise, for example, the agency of local groups in adopting or resisting elements of the material culture, ideals or beliefs of other cultures such as Hellenic and Roman.

At the beginning of the volume the editors identify their target audience as “scholars, graduate and undergraduate students, and the broader educated public” (p. 5). In this respect, the book falls a little short of expectations or rather tries to cater to too many audiences. While the majority of chapters would be useful for post-graduate students, providing them with a succinct overview of the current literature, or for those who find themselves teaching broad diachronic surveys on the ancient Levant, it is not ideal for undergraduate students or the educated public. In many cases, readers are required to have at

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least some general archaeological understanding and region-specific background knowledge; there are also a number of scientific and archaeological terms that have no gloss for the general reader. The fact that the authors have been asked to cater to such a wide audience is, to a certain extent, visible in a lack of consistency between chapters in terms of formatting. Explanatory text boxes are used in some chapters (e.g. 18 & 23) but not others, which means that the volume occupies a slightly uneasy space between an undergraduate academic handbook and a textbook designed for graduate students and researchers. One key element missing from many of the chapters is a map, without which the non-expert reader may be a little disoriented.

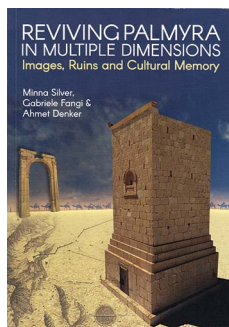
Catering to an audience as broad as that outlined in the prologue is indeed a challenge, and in general the limitations do not detract from the overall importance and value of this volume. While very few scholars may tackle the volume as a whole, the individual chapters have immense value in themselves, either as teaching tools or as articles advancing scholarly debate.

References

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MINNA SILVER, GABRIELE FANGI & AHMET DENKER. *Reviving Palmyra in multiple dimensions: images, ruins and cultural memory*. 2018. Caithness: Whittles; 978-1-84995-296-5 £30.



Reviving Palmyra in multiple dimensions documents the physical remains associated with the oasis city of Palmyra on the Silk Road in the Syrian desert. The book charts Palmyra's destruction in AD 273 by the Roman emperor Aurelian during the

Persian conflict, its subsequent decline into ruins, its inscription as a World Heritage Site in 1980, and finally the wanton damage inflicted by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from 2015–2017. In addition to paintings and photographs documenting changes to the site over the years, virtual reconstructions are used to illustrate aspects of the site that no longer exist.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. The first five contextualise the site, providing a background to the history and culture of ancient Palmyra; the next four chapters examine particular buildings and areas that have been destroyed, with each chapter focused on a specific monument. The buildings are reconstructed, using computer models, based on the evidence from historic paintings, photographs and archaeology. The final chapter (10) considers Palmyra in its post-Roman phase.

Chapter 1, 'Introducing the Memory of the Place', offers a broad overview of the history of Palmyra illustrated by historic images recording the site in the past, from the earliest painting in 1691, to a full photographic documentation of the site in 2011 and photographs showing the site's recent destruction. The chapter also describes how the site has been damaged over the last centuries, from tomb raiders in the 1790s to damage to the site as a result of the Syrian Civil War and ISIL's deliberate destruction of the ancient ruins after they captured the site in 2015. An overview is included here, introducing the methodologies of the attempts to reconstruct the site virtually using computer models and 3D printing.

The historical context of Palmyra is presented in Chapter 2 with the site and its hinterland illustrated by aerial photographs. The importance of the site as a city on the Silk Road is considered here as well as the contribution Palmyra made to the textile trade both regionally and beyond. Palmyra's significant economic growth in the second century AD was a direct result of its key position on the lucrative trade route, especially renowned for silk, linking the Roman Empire to China and Southeast Asia.

In Chapter 3, 'Revealing Cities Buried Beneath Cities', the history of the foundation of the city is described. This takes the form of a brief overview of the occupation of the area by early Neolithic settlers, through the Bronze Age settlement and Hellenistic town to Roman Palmyra. This is followed by Chapter 4, which considers the people who inhabited