



Book Reviews

HISTORIES OF ARCHAEOLOGY: A READER IN THE HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY, EDITED BY TIM MURRAY & CHRISTOPHER EVANS

Oxford University Press. 2008. 485pp, 18 b&w figs. hb ISBN 978-0-19-955007-4 (£85)

What might the subject matter of a history of archaeology be? A story of discoveries? A social history? A political history? An history of ideas? A biographical account of individual lives? An account of the entanglement of archaeology with nationalism or colonialism? There are many potential agendas which might be pursued and this reader in the history of archaeology usefully considers many of them.

The book consists of eighteen chapters, a brief introduction and an editorial paragraph introducing each of the contributions all of which have been previously published. The publication dates of the originals range from 1965 to 2002. The chapters are taken from edited and authored books and journals.

The contributions are a rather eclectic mix both in terms of the manner in which they are ordered in the book and in terms of their content and style. This rather successfully signals the broad approach taken overall by the editors to the histories of archaeology. The most general chapters in the book are concerned with how one might write the history of archaeology itself. Trigger's contribution is about historiography itself and the various attempts to write popular, intellectual and social histories of the discipline. Stoczkowski considers why this might be a beneficial exercise in the first place and to whom, and from what perspective. Givens discusses in a general way the manner in which one might write a biography of individual archaeologists.

Six chapters are concerned in various ways with archaeology and nationalism. Fowler discusses archaeology and the nation state contrasting Mexico, Great Britain and China in a general way. Funari discusses the development of archaeology in Brazil. Three chapters are concerned with archaeology in Germany: Arnold discusses archaeology in Nazi Germany, Klejn, Gustaf Kossinna, Marchand German archaeology from the late nineteenth century to the end of the First World War. Dietler discusses ethnic nationalism and the manipulation of Celtic identity in various nation states in modern Europe. All discuss the unwitting or conscious manipulation of the past in relation to ethnic, nationalist and totalitarian political agendas. This theme is certainly over represented in the book no doubt because it has provided a somewhat safe and easy target for critical analysis for many. In relation to this it is surprising that only Hall's chapter considers in any detail the relationship between archaeology and colonialism in the context of a case study of Iron Age research in South Africa.

Three chapters discuss early antiquarian archaeology: Clarke's excellent introductory polemic to *Analytical Archaeology*, Gruber the debate over the antiquity of humanity in relation to the early discoveries at Kent's Cavern and Schnapp on the relationship between antiquarians and archaeologists. Kaeser's chapter discusses the institutional basis of the International Congress of Prehistory during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The remaining chapters in the book are essentially case studies chosen to illustrate different kinds of archaeological histories. Allen's contribution is about Childe's experiences in Australia during the period 1917-21 exemplifying a biographical approach. Murray pieces together the controversy surrounding the passing of the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act in Britain with a fine grained analysis of parliamentary debates published in Hansard. Evans considers the development and contradictions between nationalist and internationalist agendas for archaeological research through the prism of a conference held at the Institute of Archaeology, London in 1943 concerned with the Future of Archaeology. Diaz-Andreu and Sørensen attempt to trace the hidden history of women in archaeology. These chapters are by far the most innovative and interesting studies in the book providing us with a hint of what more nuanced and sophisticated approach to the histories of archaeology might look like in the future using previously unconsidered textual materials.

The editors clearly want to promote the further development and refinement of different kinds of histories of archaeology, a laudable goal. But in reading through the individual chapters some of which were already familiar to me, I became increasingly dissatisfied. What was wrong? Ultimately, despite the apparent breadth of perspective presented here the histories are rather conservative and limited in scope. Three of these were previously published in Murray's *Encyclopedia of Archaeology: Histories and Discoveries* (2001), which makes one wonder whether there might perhaps be a perceived shortage of suitable material to hand on the part of the editors. There is an overwhelming emphasis on European prehistoric archaeology and European prehistorians. There is Funari's chapter on Brazil, a few pages on China and Mexico in Fowler's contribution, and Hall's discussion of southern Africa but that is as far as it goes for the rest of the world. There are no histories here of ethnoarchaeological research, material culture studies, field archaeology (as opposed to excavation), landscape studies, Medieval archaeology, industrial archaeology, Egyptology, museum collections, aerial photography, technologies (computer studies, aerial and other

uses of photography, pollen and mollusc analysis, dating techniques) and their development to list just a few areas. These are a few of the silent histories of archaeology not covered in the book. Apart from the discussions of the work of early antiquarians and their relationship with geologists and early evolutionary anthropology there is no discussion of interdisciplinary relationships. Even more crucially there is virtually no discussion of the *materiality* of archaeological remains: the character and qualities of the evidence with which people worked and no sustained analysis of the ways in which the past is represented in maps, photographs, illustrations etc. (there are a few illustrations but one cannot say that much visual theory has been used in their analysis), no discussion beyond the rudimentary of textual discourses. Beyond rather narrow discussions of ethnicity and racial politics in relation to nationalism there is little social and political analysis in the book. What were the politics of those attending the 1943 conference in London? What were the social backgrounds and mores of the individuals involved? Evans does not even broach these questions. Similarly the main focus on the important chapter on women in archaeology is employment, or the lack thereof, of women in university departments and museums, and the type of research undertaken and the publications (or not) that arose. But what kind of women were these? Beyond a narrow focus on archaeology what was their relationship to the politics and society of the times? There appears to be something of a disciplinary myopia at work here.

It interested me that over and over again individual contributors mentioned somewhere or other in their chapters the peripheral nature of much research in the history of archaeology, that to many it didn't seem important and didn't seem to get anywhere and that this needed to be rectified. I would agree entirely but so long as the histories written seem so limited in scope and so disconnected from a consideration of society and politics this will inevitably be the case. Another issue cropping up was whether we can learn anything from a history of archaeology. Can it inform contemporary theory and debate? The authors think it can, or should but this remains wishful thinking insofar as this is not really explored at all. The various histories covered in the book appear peculiarly isolated and insulated from the present. Interesting they may be in their own right but the connections beyond the obvious (beware of the distortions of National Socialism or the Chinese cultural revolution) remain few and far between. Part of the problem here may be that 'history' in this book seems to stop at 1945 and in most chapters long before that!

This is an interesting and useful compilation and the editors are to be congratulated for the diligence in which they have selected the chapters to give some kind of a much-needed overview. In the future one might, however, want an altogether different kind of volume. The price of the book, from I note, a university rather than a commercial press is absolutely outrageous ensuring that nobody except a few Russian oligarchs will be able to purchase it.

Christopher Tilley
Department of Anthropology
University College London

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