



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY.** Edited by Robin Skeates, Carol McDavid and John Carman. Pp. 752, Illus 84. Oxford University Press, 2012. Price: £95.00. ISBN 978 019923 782 1.

This edited volume contains papers from thirty-four contributors, many of whom have been key authorities in the development and practice of public archaeology. The papers cover the major debates in public archaeology, from its historiography to its practice. In an attempt to provide a worldwide perspective on public archaeology and its overarching themes, the book draws on contributions from professionals and academics working around the globe. The coming together of Skeates, McDavid and Carman, three seminal figures in public archaeology, to produce this volume is testimony to the perceived value of this sub-discipline and its pivotal role in the modern day practice of archaeology.

The editors aim to bring together the work of long established experts in the field with younger professionals, enabling a broader contribution to the public archaeology debate. It is questionable whether this has been achieved, as some of the contributors are from a narrow geographical sphere, predominately the US and the UK. This is surprising, especially as the scarcity of published European and non-western case studies was previously highlighted by Marshall in *Community Archaeology* (2002). Twelve years later, only the UK has risen to the challenge, although the volume contains just two articles from researchers working in non-Western countries and few from our antipodean colleagues. This highlights Kristiansen's argument (Chapter 23) on a preference towards English language research for publication. It is this lack of range that hinders the reader's engagement with the full scope of the theories and methods in public archaeology.

The division of the volume into six thematic sections aims to offer a guide to the subject areas. This is particularly successful with the placing of Boyd's and Gardener's papers, which marry beautifully alongside each other. Many chapters provide thematic cross-overs and for some it could be argued they would be more effective in alternative sections, making the thematic division often appear somewhat superficial, something that is highlighted by the final theme's lack of direction.

A highlight is the informal abstracts at the beginning of the chapters, which introduces the author and the key themes to be addressed. This offers a useful contextual overview and reference point for the reader. It is a shame that these are inconsistent in quality, with some merely writing a personal biography. As is often an issue with edited volumes, the quality of the chapters vary, with some merely repeating already published material. There are some notable papers, including Jeppson (Chapter 30), who refreshingly challenges conventional thought, and Boyd (Chapters 9), whose reference to other

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contributors encourages the reader to challenge theories and he highlights the wider conflicts between public archaeology and mainstream archaeological practice. I would suggest this insight and linkage is a result of a well-organized peer reviewing process and it is therefore a credit to the editors.

While the volume is not without issue, the editors should be praised for bringing together some key figures and current debates. Collectively, these papers provide a reference collection for students and professionals on this topic that enables the reader to engage in a degree of critical dialogue. Subsequently, perhaps one should not quibble over what could be seen as trivial matters of thematic linkage and global balance.

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