



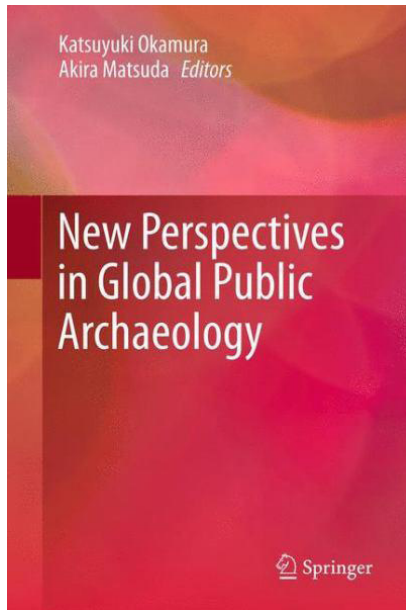
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Online Journal in Public Archaeology

REVIEWS



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English Heritage

New Perspectives in Global Public Archaeology

[Ed. by Katsuyuki Okamura
and Akira Matsuda]

Springer
ISBN: 978-1-4614-0340-1
280 pages

This really stimulating book lives up to its far reaching title. 20 chapters, covering contributions from every continent, consider what public archaeology is and how it is expressed in individual countries. It is particularly refreshing to read a book which is not dominated by European or North American perspectives. The editors begin the volume with a strong piece exploring the variety of meanings that 'Public Archaeology' can have. They recognise that there is a particular issue around the meaning of the word 'Public' both in English, where the term originated, and in most other languages considered in the book. There is a real tension between Public as state-sponsored and Public as relating to community concerns. In the end, they settle on a definition which defines the volume, even though many papers may diverge from it: "a subject that examines the relationship between archaeology and the public and seeks to improve it" (4).

The papers present a mix of case studies, surveys of current practice and histories of development of the field. Although each paper can be read usefully on its own, it really is worth reading the

whole volume, both for the themes which are developed and for the comparative perspective that is helpful.

For instance, papers from Thailand, Jordan, Peru, and Korea highlight tensions between tourism as the main benefit of archaeology for the public and other roles that Public Archaeology can play. It is a real point of tension for post-colonial societies. A particular problem here is highlighted in Thiaw's paper on slavery in Senegal, where tourism regarding the transatlantic Slave trade bolsters the silencing of domestic slavery past and present. Hopefully, this volume will allow these comparisons to be made more often so that we can learn from each other.

Most authors are careful to present the historical and political context of their work in some detail so that it is not necessary to know the field in order to follow arguments. Inevitably, I feel better able to criticise the papers that are closer to my own research background. Both the papers discussing Britain and the paper discussing Canada present the promotion of Public Archaeology as largely a matter of communication. There is little consideration of how archaeology in these societies is implicated in contemporary power structures. Similarly, Pyburn suggests that "The situation has been quite different for British, European, Australian, and American archaeologists practicing outside their own nations, where the connection of the past to national heritage has been controversial". I think that the connection of the past to national heritage is controversial in most nations, but we are sometimes too close to the power structures to see our role in them.

This is well contrasted by Abu-Khafajah in his detailed consideration of the use of archaeology in the Citadel of Amman. The extensive use of material from informants allows his work to represent considerably both people who are excited by the expensive parties that the citadel is often used for, and those who feel excluded by them. The use of informants also adds depth to Matsuda's consideration of transnational politics in Public Archaeology. It is a brave thing to take this critical approach to your own work, and he pursues honesty in his informants to make sure that it goes beyond self-justification.

In his historical exploration of the beginnings of Public Archaeology in China, Wang brings forward the disjunction between the two meanings of 'public' that are highlighted in the introduction. State-sanctioned archaeology is not always of interest to or in the interests of a wider sense of the public. Academic archaeologists in China are

now reluctant to become involved in Public Archaeology because they are worried about manipulation of their research. In all of the papers with a historical dimension there is a common narrative that vibrant research in archaeology is deadened by control by state bureaucracy and a hope that contact with 'the Public' will enliven it again.

Overall, there is a strong belief in the value and power of archaeology to tell 'true' stories based on evidence. Henson is particularly convinced that the richer past offered by archaeology is useful in empowering citizens to consider issues like climate change. Even in their description of a multi-vocal approach to the heritage of the American Southwest, Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. give archaeology pride of place as the framework by which the work is constructed.

However, archaeology is not always the best way to serve a public interest in the past. But in his discussion of the Prestwich Street Dead, Shepherd argues that archaeological interests conflicted with public interests and have harmed community cohesion and appropriate remembrance. Similarly, Burke et al. describe an Australian project that was clearly based on public interest. But by exploring a WWII hospital and its air raid shelters they may have reduced some of the value that the site held for its communities.

Sand et al. take a more pragmatic approach to the use of archaeology in nation building for New Caledonia. Aware of the many ways in which archaeology can be used, they have consciously chosen to support a diverse and politically sensitive use of the past in their work. I was quite surprised when I read the piece because it was so open about the deliberate choice of projects for their public purpose, rather than for pursuit of the 'truth'. But the paper convinced me that if we are truly pursuing Public Archaeology then 'Archaeology' may need to come after the 'Public'.

Hodder makes an argument for flexibility of approach, relating to the needs of different publics, using his long-running project at Catalhöyük as a case study. His consideration of situational ethics is useful, but he does not examine what his own motivation for the work is, and this is something that runs through many of the papers. We spend time considering what motivates members of the public to become involved in 'our work' but we don't acknowledge what drives us.

The focus of the volume really is on the relationship between archaeologists and the various publics they engage with, but there is some discussion of the types of engagement involved. Only two papers

discuss the use of social media, and in both cases it was an addition to the original plans for work. The e-journal *Arkeos* is described as an excellent medium for encouraging interaction between archaeologists and the public. Perhaps it is simply an indication of the fact that digital technologies move faster than publishing books like this, but neither paper presents a very sophisticated view of the complex ways in which social media create and are created by communities.

A number of papers consider the important role of education in Public Archaeology. The detailed assessment of archaeology in the Jordanian primary school system is also critically aware of the political role of the past in Jordan. A similarly critical view is given of the circumstance in Japan by Murata and this paper provides a good context for the work in an overall exploration of the role of education in Japanese society. Both papers highlight the ways in which particular periods are taught while others are excluded. I am struck by the challenge we face in trying to use archaeology to broaden children's understanding of the past. Because this exclusion serves political purposes we must address the politics and not simply hope that improving our communication or providing better resources will remedy the situation.

The volume represents a real milestone in Public Archaeology because of its reach, detail and critical approach. It is striking, however, that the papers from the countries where the notion of Public Archaeology originated are less critical in their approach than those from countries which see themselves as only beginning. Perhaps this is because there is more awareness of how politically significant the past can be, stemming from the resistance of governments and institutions to broaden archaeology's reach.

AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology

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Cover Image: *Storyboard for a PSA in Philly* (H. Winograd and M. Haas)

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ISSN: 2171-6315

Quotation:

May, S. 2012. Review: New Perspectives in Global Public Archaeology.

AP Journal Vol. 2, 141-144.

AP Journal is a peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to Public Archaeology. It is freely distributed online on the Website:

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