

Review article

The expanding and deepening scope of historical archaeology

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ALASDAIR BROOKS & NATASCHA MEHLER. *The country where my heart is: historical archaeologies of nationalism and national identity*. 2017. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-5433-9 \$89.95.

MARK WARNER & MARGARET PURSER (ed.). *Historical archaeology through a Western lens*. 2017. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 978-0-8032-7728-1 \$70.

CRAIG N. CIPOLLA (ed.). *Foreign objects. Rethinking indigenous consumption in American archaeology*. 2017. Tucson: University of Arizona Press; 978-0-8165-3191-2 \$65.

2017 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of both the Society for Historical Archaeology, in North America, and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology, in the UK. Each society celebrated this milestone by publishing a collection of forward-looking essays in their respective journals (see Brooks



2016; Matthews 2016). Although each group of practitioners has followed what might be best described as parallel, but not convergent, intellectual tracks, what they have shared is a common focus on the period of European expansion and colonialism starting in the late fifteenth century. Since that time, the two fields have grown much closer, while the larger intellectual project that is historical archaeology has seen its popularity grow across the globe. In many respects, these three volumes, while different, nevertheless provide a rich collection of chapters that reveal both the widening and deepening of the field.

With close to 40 individual chapters between the three volumes, it is impossible to discuss any of them in real detail. Instead, I would like to concentrate on the various topics that bind each of the three volumes internally, as well as those that they share in common. The latter includes a desire to see the focus of historical archaeology expanded temporally, both by connecting more recent and deeper pasts as well as by drawing clearer connections with the present. A second commonality is the importance of things and their role in the construction and maintenance of individual, group and national identities. Still a third feature of all three volumes is the importance of historical narratives in the construction of nationalisms that often involve the purposeful erasure or denial of particular pasts.

The chapters in *Foreign objects: rethinking indigenous consumption in American archaeology* deal primarily with the manner in which things play an active role in the construction of identity and daily life. Craig Cipolla, the volume's editor, provides an interesting introduction that situates the topic of consumption—which rests at the heart of the volume—in a broader, post-colonial theoretical context. Over the course of the many chapters, the volume's authors offer stimulating discussions of the manner in which material culture was traded, consumed, used and reinterpreted by Native Americans. Chapters by Borck and Mills, Creese, and Cobb and Stephenson give good examples of studies that draw theoretical inspiration from post-colonial understandings of hybridity and consumption in their discussions of material culture in the construction and expression of identity among Native American groups living in North America over the past 1000 years. Several chapters, including those by Beaudoin, Bragdon, Loren, Creese, and Shepard and Gallivan, focus explicitly on the role that European material culture played in the construction

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of difference within Native American societies—often between elites and ‘others’. The underlying conclusion of many of these chapters is that far from losing identity through the adoption of European material culture, Native American groups reinterpreted these items in a manner consistent with their own cultural practices. Still other chapters (Oland, Howey, Cobb and Stephenson) focus on the role of things in the spiritual life of North American indigenous groups. Chapters by Panich and Rubertone focus on the experience of Native Americans during the nineteenth century as *vaqueros* (horsemen) in California, and as the producers of medicines in New England. In his postscript, Cipolla revisits issues of consumption as well as the larger theoretical importance of ‘thing theory’. As a group, the chapters in this volume succeed in providing rich case studies that will have wide appeal for archaeologists working in post-colonial contexts, or those interested in novel and stimulating ways of interpreting material culture.

Historical archaeology through a Western lens is, as its title suggests, a volume that focuses exclusively on the North American West as a place and as a process. Both the Introduction, written by the volume’s editors (Purser and Warner), and Purser’s individual chapter situate the research presented in the volume by stressing the boom-and-bust cycles that have punctuated the history of the region and how ‘boomsurfers’—individuals who sought to take advantage of a highly dynamic regional economy—have left behind a landscape littered with the detritus of such an unpredictable history. While the individual chapters focus on specific places and experiences, it is as a group that they meet the expectations set for the volume. Although it addresses a host of topics, one of its most noteworthy qualities is its exclusive focus on the recent past and its connection to the present. The volume’s editors note this explicitly in their Introduction, and it stands out as you read through the various chapters. The view offered through this ‘Western Lens’ is one of vastness and emptiness, in which archaeology can be as much about recording the landscape as it is about digging into the past. As the individual chapters demonstrate, this is a past very much in the minds of those still living—resulting in numerous case studies that draw on both documentary evidence and oral histories.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first of these deals with the overarching challenges faced by those who either managed or worked

in highly extractive economies that were heavily influenced by global markets. The dynamic quality of these regional economies is visible in the rapid growth of San Francisco (Delgado) during the Gold Rush of the mid nineteenth century, as well as in Walker’s discussion of the challenges of doing the archaeology of the transient labour camps that dotted the West. Another facet of the West as both place and process was its amazing diversity, captured well in Cromwell’s discussion of Fort Vancouver. The diversity of histories and cultural practices that converged in this part of the world makes for some of the more interesting chapters in the section on race and racism. This section of the book opens with a chapter by Joe Watkins—a well-known indigenous scholar—who provides a highly readable account of how Native Americans adapted to a rapidly changing landscape shaped by a highly mobile labour force. The other chapters in this section of the book focus on the experience of Chinese and Japanese labourers during the nineteenth (Dixon and Smith) and early twentieth centuries (Ross). Bonnie Clark’s insightful and moving chapter on the experience of the Japanese living in the Second World War internment camp of Amache illustrates a good example of historical archaeology, willing to examine narratives that seek to ignore or purposely erase difficult pasts.

The final section of the book continues some of the themes developed earlier in the volume by examining the challenges of working in such a large region. Minette Church exemplifies how historical archaeology can sort fact from fiction when dealing with historical narratives. Her discussion of the history of the Santa Fe Trail is a prime example of how US history—embodied by the entrepreneurial explorer—ignores earlier Native American and Hispanic histories that are intrinsically part of the Santa Fe Trail’s deeper past. Tim Scarlett’s cautionary tale of his experience doing the archaeology of contested pasts in Utah is one of the clearer examples of the perils of researching pasts that are intrinsically linked to contemporary identities. Mark Warner’s discussion of household archaeology in Idaho argues that despite the vastness and isolation of the West, its residents sought to surround themselves with the trappings of Victorian-era material culture, including pianos—a critical accoutrement of notions such as domesticity and its highly gendered implications. The volume concludes with a thoughtful summary by Matthew Johnson that links the history of the West to larger processes such as the expansion of

industrial capitalism, and to intellectual threads such as the work of US frontier historian Fredrick Jackson Turner.

The third volume, *The country where my heart is: historical archaeologies of nationalism and national identity*, is an illuminating and interesting collection of essays. The Introduction to the volume, written by the volume's editors, Alasdair Brooks and Natascha Mehler, links the roles of material culture, history and archaeology to the growth and perpetuation of nationalist narratives. What I found inventive was the manner in which they focused on particular items of material culture—kilts and lederhosen—as vehicles for understanding the often surprisingly recent origins of many nationalist narratives. In the chapters that follow, the authors supply a rich set of studies that reveal the importance of history and histories in the construction of nationalism. Although the volume has a distinctly European focus, it contains discussions of nationalism in Scandinavia, Ireland and Britain, Turkey, North and South America. These generally fall into two camps—those that look at the construction of nationalist narratives from histories often constructed through archaeology, and those that look at the role of material culture in the expression of nationalist identities. Chapters by Fowler and Noël, Predovnik, Eichert and Jenks, examine the role of ethnogenesis in the construction of nationalism, often built on contested histories. The role of myth is highlighted by several authors, especially Prodochnik and Echert, as a vehicle for suppressing or erasing particular pasts in support of other histories. The bulk of the book's chapters focus extensively on the way history and material culture have been marshalled in support of certain pasts. The chapters by Mytum and Horning are especially enlightening as they demonstrate just how central archaeology has been to the production of highly nationalist and highly dubious historical narratives. Horning's chapter is particularly instructive in this regard. Comer and Belasus provide detailed discussions of how the materiality of nobility in Denmark (Comer) and the archaeological interpretation of ships (Belasus) have helped to support historical narratives that are often in conflict with contemporary Danish and German notions of identity. Newstead and De Cunzo focus on the way that colonial histories are being actively rewritten to embrace cultural diversities that are revealed through archaeology but have often been ignored in the construction of nationalist narratives

in the past. The final two chapters of the volume are excellent. Dikkaya's chapter looks at the way the Ottoman past was suppressed in the post-First World War Turkey of Kamal Atatürk in favour of an archaeologically revealed history of the Hittite and Sumerian civilisations. The volume concludes with a chapter by Schávelzon and Igareta that considers a nationalism never realised in detailing the steps taken by the Chilean government to suppress the pre-contact history of the Rapa Nui of Easter Island.

Each of the volumes contains case studies that would not have been found in the literature of historical archaeology 20 years ago. Part of this reflects the conscious efforts of the volume's editors and authors to bridge the divide between history and prehistory. As a result of its connections with European colonialism, many archaeologists working in post-colonial contexts have called for an end to—or, in some instances, the death of—prehistory as an analytical and temporal construct (Schmidt & Mrozowski 2013). This is due in no small measure to the growing number of collaborations that archaeologists are developing with indigenous and descendant groups. Many of the latter find the concept of prehistory offensive and see it as a barrier to collaboration. These volumes contain several examples of scholarship that bridge the artificial divide between the recent and deeper pasts, as well as those that document connections between the past and a highly fractious present, shaped in many ways by the very processes that they examine in their research. Whether it is the role of material culture in the construction of identities, or the archaeological examination of narratives linked to shared identities of the North American West, or the central role that archaeology and material culture has played in the construction of nationalist narratives, these volumes showcase an intellectually vibrant historical archaeology that should garner the attention of archaeologists of all persuasions.

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