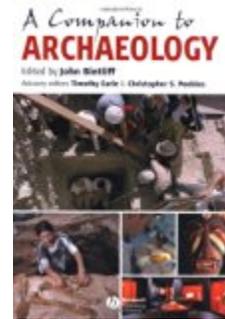


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Bintliff, ed. *A Companion to Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004. xxiv + 544 pp. \$124.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-631-21302-4.

Reviewed by Andrew Brodie Smith (Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town)
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Archaeology Unclothed: Not Your Usual Bed Partner

This is not your usual book on Archaeology, although it covers an eclectic gamut of what archaeologists think and do. Neither is it simply an introductory text to Archaeology. The title is slightly ingenuous, as it might seem that it could be found on your bedside table for easy reading. While the twenty-seven chapters are written in a clear discursive style, easy reading it is not, but having said that, it is one of the best introductions to modern archaeology in all her guises that I have ever read.

The writers are all well-known in their various sub-disciplines, so that their chapters become personal statements about the theoretical background to their work. The editor says that other writers were invited to participate in the project, but were not able to complete their sections in time between 1999 and 2002. Those who failed to find the time, or declined to participate, might be cursing themselves, as this was an excellent opportunity to stand up and be counted along with one's peers.

The editor, John Bintliff, places each of the contributions within its space in "Archaeology" in his introduction. Any reader should look closely at what Bintliff says about each chapter, as his "take" on the authors' positions is not just a summary of what each author has to say, but an analytical response. With this volume he practices his own belief that "a healthy discipline needs endless variety of opinions and methods and should avoid doctrinaire ideologies" (p. xviii).

The structure of the book is in four parts: I) Archaeologists (Shennan and Thomas) Thinking about Archaeology; II) Genes, language, social theory, technol-

ogy: Current Themes and Novel Departures (Jones, Blench, Srenson, Johnson, Fletcher, Gerritsen, Greene and Bintliff; III) Dating, human evolution, classics, fauna, ecology, landscape, art: Major Traditions in Archaeology in Contemporary Perspective (Gowlett, Jansen, Morris, Orser, Rowley-Conwy, Hassan, Wilkinson, Corbey/Layton/Tanner, Pollard and Bintliff); IV) CRM, museums, politics, green issues: Archaeology and the Public (Darvill, Tainter, Ellis, Rowlands, Shanks and Bell).

The book is perhaps a culmination of introspective science that, in turn, now recognizes that the raw data of archaeology is still the basis of our discipline. And, while Shennan's (chapter 1) opening comment is true that "Archaeology today is subject to the tyranny of the present," this volume is an attempt to get beyond the reduction of ideas "to their sources and subject to retrospective disapproval" (p. 3). I am reminded of the same disapproval by social anthropologists of old ethnographies, or historians' disapproval of early colonial travelers' reports. These are wonderful sources of information, albeit within the colonial mindset, but the worlds are gone, and only archaeology can now reconstruct the pieces. I believe, like Rowlands (chapter 25), that archaeology is capable of getting beyond "the burden of ethnographic parallels and the distortions these have introduced into archaeological theorizing" (p. 485).

Another important aspect of this book is that it does not neglect the discussion of the place of the "hard" sciences. The two contributions by Gowlett (chapter 11) on dating and Pollard (chapter 20) on scientific think-

ing are at pains to show how these are integral to modern archaeology, but need to be within the necessary theoretical framework to avoid being purely descriptive and without any larger significance. (To quote the title of Dave Killick and Suzanne Young's 1997 paper in *Antiquity*: "Archaeology and Archaeometry: From Casual Dating to Meaningful Relationship").

The book will be an important tome for post-graduate

reading and seminars to discuss how archaeologists position themselves within sub-disciplines. Each chapter is well-referenced, so can be used as a jumping-off point for essay writing, etc. However, lecturer beware, using this book will inevitably challenge you to think deeply about aspects of archaeology you might be unfamiliar with (so you might need to have it on your bedside table, or in bed with you).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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