

## Book reviews

*Dušan Borić (ed.)*

**Archaeology and Memory.** 210 pages, 78 figures. 2010. Oxford: Oxbow Books; ISBN 978-1-84217-363-3 hardback.

Stimulated by a growing interest in the issue of memory, remembering and forgetting in the various fields of humanities and social studies, this volume illuminates the relationship between archaeology and memory. In doing so, it raises some perennial but also novel questions. What is the relationship between materiality and memory? What diverse mnemonic systems for inscribing the 'past in the past' can be discerned through archaeological records? How does archaeology understand time and, consequently, represent the past? What are the consequences of the interplay between the uses of memory and archaeological practice? Varied answers are provided by eleven contributors from the fields of archaeology, anthropology and the arts. As far as the organisation of the volume is concerned, twelve papers are organised into three sections. Following a theoretical introduction that gives an historical overview of the development of the concept of memory in philosophy (Borić), there are seven papers (Whittle, Borić, Tringham, Jones, Hanks, Boozer and Gutteridge) which are concerned with the theme of the 'past in the past'. Six of these elaborate on diverse prehistoric and classical case studies from the Eurasian regional contexts. The seventh, on the other hand, is written as a personal recollection of how the creation of the archaeological record has changed through time with the development of digital media (Tringham). The final section in the book comprises four papers which explore the archaeologies and memories of the contemporary past, three of them through selected case studies (Filippucci, Weiss, Bajić) and the fourth from a theoretical perspectives (Buchli).

A number of key points arise throughout the twelve chapters. First, memory which can be seen as a curated and fragmented past embedded in the present is expressed through incorporated bodily actions and performances. However, it can be also inscribed as a text into material objects, monuments, landscapes and places by the practical engagements of people with the world. Several philosophical concepts, particularly concepts of trace, citation and repetition/re-capitulation (Borić p. 16–21, 24–26) which are of

practical relevance for examining the relation between remembering, forgetting, and materiality, allow the contributors to present a number of case studies of materialised memories embodied in the forms of dwelling structures (Whittle, Borić, Boozer), monumental public architecture (Gutteridge), burial structures (Whittle, Borić, Jones, Hanks), votive offerings (Jones), landscapes of conflict, violence and war (Filippucci, Weiss), as well as digital archaeological archives (Tringham) and virtual museum (Bajić).

Second, singularity is not in the nature of time – on the contrary, it is inherent to each segment of time to be composite. Hence, the present (also the present in the past) is formed as a palimpsest, consisting not only of the present time, but also of fragments of different pasts. This phenomenon is most readily observed in our physical environment, as is shown by an illustrative case study by Gutteridge. The author describes the locale of the Arch of Constantine as a place where past and present conjoin in the form of historical topography, peopled by tourists, street merchants and men dressed as gladiators and centurions equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> century gadgets such as mobile phones. Similarly, the distinction between the past and the present is dissolved in the Arch itself: spoliated reliefs from at least three older monuments are used intentionally to achieve an effect of timelessness along with the elision of biographical and cosmic time. As Gutteridge stresses, this principle of selective curation negates the linear temporal principle of historic time and instead creates a bricolage of events and their material manifestations that are “*moved, shuffled, and relocated in the spatial and temporal landscape, ... never fully out-of-time*” (p. 168).

Third, following the sociological distinction between individual and collective memory, the majority of authors seek to examine diverse engagements with the world that are involved in creating collective identities and collective memories. When, for example, Whittle (p. 38) writes on dwelling and the everyday activities of “*building structures, herding animals, tending crops, procuring raw materials, in-*

teracting with co-residents, neighbours and others, and attending to the level of floodwaters when they came" that came about in the Neolithic settlement of Ecsegfalva 23 in the Great Hungarian Plain, he brings to the forefront social knowledge and collective memories as preconditions for daily life. On the other hand, as shown by Boozer, archaeology is able (in particular instances) also to touch upon the topic of memory in relation to personal identity construction and maintenance. The case study of an elite male who decorated his Roman Egyptian house in Amheida by the end of third century with Homeric mythological scenes reveals the particular strategies used by a wealthy individual to define his position within the imperial framework.

Fourth, the past living on in the form of materialised memories returns and is never completely gone. Weiss's paper, which explores the landscapes of conflict and violence created in the 1990s Balkan wars, presents the immense power of mutilated landscape and how these are able to pull victims into a loop of reliving past atrocities. The author asks that a more equitable role for material evidence be given in relation to written documents and witness testimonies in international criminal tribunals, since "*there is a profound tenacity inherent in certain objects, markers and monuments in the landscape – a tenacity tending towards the continual recapitulation of the intentions and agendas of power*" (p. 192).

Fifth, similar to memory itself, archaeological objects, places and landscapes often convey traces of repetition/recapitulation. This is illustrated by two Meso/Neolithic contexts of the Danube gorges (Borić): in the case of Lepenski Vir, older, Early Mesolithic hearths were (partially) superimposed by later trapezoidal structures; while in the case of Vlasac, burials were superimposed at the same location for several generations. According to the author, both examples convey the principle of reproduction which enables the past to live on in disguised form in the present, yet, on the other hand, this brings with it – besides tradition – innovation and change.

Sixth, the nature of historical time is dissimilar to the nature of archaeological time: while the former consists of dates and chronologies which arrange singular events into a unilinear sequence, the latter represents the fusion of fragmented and materialised pasts and the present entwined in a continual dialogue. Gutteridge brilliantly illuminates this point by comparing the nature of archaeological narratives with the principle of spoliation: "*In archaeology, this*

*spoliation, ... The repetitive rhythmic movement between the past and the present, the removal of individual instants from their embedded layers of context, the shuffling of our kaleidoscopic attempts to combine different pasts to speak to the present, and our refusal to let these fragments fall away silently from the future, all play a role in the ways in which we create and interpret our cacophonous spoliated memorials to the archaeological past*" (p. 168).

These are the highlights of this book. Yet I would also like to point out to some of the difficulties that arise when the concept of memory is applied to archaeological discourse. The biggest hindrance stems from the fact that memory is primarily a psychological process and therefore difficult to trace in archaeological records. While the premise of memory embedded in materiality creates a bridge between the material and the immaterial, it does not necessarily help to recognise the fundamental distinctions between influence and memory or repetition/replication and continuity in the archaeological material itself. Indeed, dwellings were built on older dwellings; burials were reused or superimposed over older burials. Yet how can we penetrate behind the general statement that this was a meaningful reuse of space and grasp the actual meanings behind it? Even more so, since the psychological, social and cultural experience behind these acts belongs to a world and time of 'others'. As exemplified by case studies of prehistoric burials (cf. Whittle, Borić, Jones, Hanks), a vast range of speculations and unknowns is involved in interpreting archaeological traces of past commemorative acts. It is not uncommon that authors adhere to very general statements: a long barrow in Southern Britain is seen as a "*loci of diverse remembrance*" (p. 43); a superposition of burials at the site of Vlasac "*evokes strict rules and closely-followed observances of the 'ancestral' ways*" (p. 64); in North-western Scotland "*the deposition of grave goods impress themselves upon memory*" (p. 114); in Iron Age Eurasia "*elaborate tombs, ... provided important physical contexts for both inscribed and embodied memory practices surrounding the lifestyle of the warrior*" (p. 134). This kind of ambiguity in formulations originates from the constraints of archaeological material that inhibit the recognition of a particular and intentional commemorative significance in preserved traces. What becomes obvious when reading through the book is that the concept of memory is used to much greater effect in the case studies of explicit intentionality of monumental public architecture, textual narratives (in this volume,

presented by studies of figurative depictions, digital archives and virtual museum) and our contemporary pasts which allow us to recognise our intense psychological, social and cultural engagement with them.

Archaeology and Memory contains a wealth of interesting case studies and ideas. While the theoretical

chapters (Borić, Buchli) are challenging, the book's subject matter and its interdisciplinary scope make reading highly rewarding. This book should be an indispensable read for anyone ready to expand the range of questions on the past and to reflect on the ethical responsibilities of archaeological narratives.

**Paul G. Bahn (ed.)**

**An Enquiring Mind: Studies in Honor of Alexander Marshack.** xix + 332 pages, 180 figures, 4 tables. 2010. Oxford [England]; Oakville [Conn.]: Oxbow Books; ISBN 978-1 84217-383-1 hardback.

This volume represents a tribute to Alexander Marshack – an eminent science journalist and photographer who came into the field of Palaeolithic research in 1963 at the age of forty-five as a self-taught outsider with the idea that “*certain marks, etched in patterns on bone, represented a calendrical system*” (p. 3). In the next forty years, Alexander Marshack contributed enormously to the field of Palaeolithic art research; particularly through his work on the cognitive abilities of early humans and themes such as notational systems, female imagery, finger flutings and net-like motifs, archaeo-astronomy, but also by introducing the new techniques of infrared, ultraviolet and fluorescence light into examining cave paintings.

In accordance with the various research interests of the late Alexander Marshack, twenty seven contributors in twenty two chapters elaborate on such diverse themes and topics as mnemonic systems, rituals, evolution and human cognition, and Palaeolithic art. Their expertise in various fields, ranging from archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, astronomy and economics, along with their personal acknowledgements of the inspiration of Marshack's work, testify to his great legacy. Although the papers in this volume are organised alphabetically, this short overview presents them in four sections as recognised by themes they share.

The first thematic section in the volume comprises two papers (Soffer, Tattersall) that seek to explore evolution and human cognition. Soffer, who is concerned with the ‘Neanderthal enigma’, argues against interpreting the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition as a revolution, and against the use of environmental determinism for the last Neanderthal niches, since “*it is not only Neolithic or Bronze Age “man” that made “himself” but so did “his and hers” Middle and Upper Paleolithic predecessors – creating*

*both their cultures and biologies through day to day decisions and their intended and unintended consequences*” (p. 303). If Soffer stresses as the principal element of modernity “*institutionalized interdependence – the various social ties that create permanent inter-sex bonds between adult individuals through such grouping principles as marriage, kinship, and descent ideologies*” (p. 290), Tattersall seeks to explore modernity through the advent of symbolic cognition in Homo sapiens. The author elaborates on the view that the symbolic intellect is “*the result of a qualitative rather than a quantitative revolution in hominid cognition: something equivalent in scale developmentally to the unanticipated and apparently abrupt appearance of the essentially modern hominid body skeleton much earlier in hominid evolution*” (p. 320–321).

Four papers in the volume (Aveni, Hudson, Krupp and Schmandt-Besserat) are concerned with mnemonic systems. While Hudson tracks the evolution of counting systems from the Palaeolithic to the earliest city-states and stresses the continuous importance of calendrical systems for social structures, Schmandt-Besserat compares and contrasts two major symbolic systems of art and writing to conclude that not only did “*The two communication systems had a different origin, history and evolution*” but also “*art became a universal phenomenon, writing remained the privilege of a few societies*” (p. 266). Aveni contributes to the topic by presenting a particular type of Mesoamerican petroglyph – pecked crosses, whose various uses were connected to celestial phenomena and calendars. A paper by Krupp, on the other hand, explores an ancient Greek constellation myth that captures the seasonality of the rains.

The third thematic section in the volume consists of two chapters (Frank, Lorblanchet) that are concerned with rituals. While Frank examines masked figu-

res visits in Europe during winter and links them to bear ceremonialism, Lorblanchet analyses various types of human traces in caves, some of which tend to imitate claw marks. The author interprets them as ritual remnants and “*evidence for ritual activity in the heart of the paleolithic sanctuaries*” (p. 165).

By far the most extensive section in the book comprises chapters examining Paleolithic and rock art. The contributors present diverse case studies, ranging from portable and parietal art from European and Near Eastern Paleolithic contexts (Belfer-Cohen & Bar-Yosef, Bosinski & Bosinski, Delluc & Delluc, d’Errico, Martin, Mussi, Otte, Pettitt & Bahn & Züchner, Sharpe & Van Gelder) to Altai Bronze age petroglyphs (Okladnikova) and Australian aboriginal rock art (Clegg). The paper by Belfer-Cohen and Bar-Yosef thus focuses on abstract and figurative art in the Near East which is dated to the late Pleistocene. The authors argue that some of the abstract Natufian markings, previously interpreted as decorations, might be notation marks, perhaps “*markers of specific groups*” (p. 32). While Bosinski and Bosinski analyse the representations of seals from the Magdalenian site of Gönnersdorf and interpret them as evidence of the long-range mobility of the group occupying a site 500 km away from the ocean, D’Errico re-examines plaquette 59 from the very same site with the oldest depiction of childbirth. The author draws attention to several new components of the engraved composition, most importantly to a third female figure. According to the author, the depiction of childbirth in an upright position assisted by other women indicates that “*relationships between women had attained a degree of complexity comparable to that of traditional societies in which these practices have been documented*” (p. 107). Delluc and Delluc examine a particular aspect of Paleolithic art – depictions of animal and human eyes to illuminate the mind of Palaeolithic artists. Otte, on the other hand, focuses on the semantic qualities of cave art by an interesting comparison of Paleolithic signs with modern road markings and graffiti. The author aims to penetrate the codified meanings of parietal art by, first, examining primary units or ‘morphemes’ consisting of “*drawings, outlines, colors and textures*” (p. 229) and, second, by analyzing complex compositions and their relationship with the space and

the viewer. While Martin publishes for the first time a detailed study of the engraved and carved block from the cave of Guoy, Mussi, on the other hand analyses the Upper Paleolithic Venus figurine of Macomer from Western Sardinia. Pettitt, Bahn and Züchner question the dating of Chauvet art to the Aurignacian and Gravettian periods as proposed by the Chauvet excavation team and convincingly argues on the basis of features, motifs and techniques ascribable to the later phases of the Upper Paleolithic, problems connected with the radiocarbon dates obtained, and the lack of parallels in the decorated caves of the region that “*while one cannot rule out the possibility of a limited amount of Aurignacian art in Chauvet, by far the greater amount of its parietal figures should be attributed to the Gravettian, Solutrean and Magdalenian*” (p. 257). Lastly, Sharpe and Van Gelder discuss various types of finger flutings – “*the lines that human fingers leave when drawn over a soft surface*” (p. 269) – which have been frequently overlooked in interpretations of Paleolithic art. By differentiating several forms of finger fluting on the basis of body movement and the number of fingers used, as documented in Rouffignac Cave, they open a new avenue for investigations of this particular type of sign.

I put this book down with mixed feelings. Reading through the collection of papers, I did not have the sense of a well integrated volume, primarily for two reasons: first, the quality of the papers varies (which is alluded to also by the editor; cf. p. x). Second, the alphabetical organisation of chapters enhances the sense of thematic incongruity. While it is not uncommon for Festschriften to compile heterogeneous themes, it is also common to present the personal recollections of an honoured scientist (in this volume Marshack, Lamberg-Karlovsky) and a complete bibliography of the person whom the book is honouring. Unfortunately, Marshack’s bibliography is missing from this volume. Nevertheless, several well-balanced, theoretically firmly grounded pieces made my reading enjoyable. In spite of the vast range of themes covered, I believe this is a book which will be read primarily by people working in the field of Paleolithic art.

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