

# New Book Chronicle

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It is understandable, perhaps inevitable, that archaeologists should be attracted to ideas of memory and of the ‘past in the past’. But other disciplines—anthropology, history, philosophy, sociology and beyond—also demonstrate a similar fascination. This wider attention has been diagnosed as symptomatic of late modernity. If so, what is the relevance and utility of memory for studies of the pre-modern past? In this NBC, we consider books that directly or indirectly explore this theme.

## Monumental memories

MARTA DÍAZ-GUARDAMINO, LEONARDO GARCÍA SANJUÁN & DAVID WHEATLEY (ed.). *The lives of prehistoric monuments in Iron Age, Roman, and Medieval Europe*. 2015. xviii+356 pages, numerous b&w illustrations, 6 tables. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-872460-5 hardback £85.

CYNTHIA KRISTAN-GRAHAM & LAURA M. AMRHEIN (ed.). *Memory traces: analyzing sacred space at five Mesoamerican sites*. 2015. xxx+231 pages, numerous b&w illustrations. Boulder: University Press of Colorado; 978-60732-376-1 hardback £65.



We are familiar with the idea that monuments are constructed to create meaning and order in the present, and to project these concepts into the future. But all the volumes under review here

agree that, however carefully crafted the script, such monuments may hold multiple meanings and are open to constant reinterpretation.

The re-use of prehistoric monuments in the past has been thoroughly explored in the British context, but less so elsewhere in north-western Europe. *The lives of prehistoric monuments in Iron Age, Roman, and Medieval Europe*, edited by DÍAZ-GUARDAMINO, GARCÍA SANJUÁN and WHEATLEY, takes an expanded geographic canvas and a more international cast

of contributors (Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Serbia, Spain and Tunisia, as well as the UK). The editors observe that a ‘biographical’ approach to monuments “makes the divide between prehistory and history look increasingly like an unbearably old-fashioned and tediously ineffectual intellectual artifice” (p. 12). They also reject the notion of *afterlives*, arguing that this unreasonably prioritises original form and function over subsequent phases.

Thirteen case studies cover the re-use of prehistoric monuments through to the nineteenth century and beyond. Geographically, these range from Knowth, Newgrange, Avebury and Jelling in the north, via the Val Camonica, Novi Pazar and Crete in the east, to the Maghreb in the south, and with a strong focus on Atlantic France and Spain in the west. There are far too many fascinating case studies to be individually discussed; two will have to suffice. Vejby examines the re-use of megalithic tombs in Brittany during the Roman period. She focuses on the presence of Venus statuettes at a subset of tombs around the Gulf of Morbihan, including one known as ‘La Butte de César’ (local legend holds that Caesar viewed his decisive naval victory over the Veneti in 56 BC from its summit). Vejby draws together the strands of evidence to propose that Roman-period votive offerings at megalithic tombs close to the location of the battle may have connected themes of victory and defeat through the figure of Caesar and his descent from Venus. This is all temptingly plausible, although discussion of exactly who might have been responsible—‘Romans’ or ‘local Gauls’—and what motivated them moves into more difficult and less convincing territory. (Also focusing on Brittany, Laporte *et al.* consider the re-use of standing stones, for example, as Gallo-Roman milestones, Christian crosses and baptismal fonts; on the latter, see below.)

Moving south, Sanmartí *et al.* present their project on the Numidian and Roman town of Althiburos in north-western Tunisia. At the associated megalithic necropolis of El Ksour, around 800 funerary monuments have been identified. Excavation of a sample of these suggests construction during the mid first millennium BC. The tombs were then re-used at various dates through to the third century AD. The

evidence is fragmentary, and it is unclear whether the intention was to bury more deceased, or to engage with ‘ancestors’. Regardless, the authors situate this reuse in the context of wider questions of change and continuity in Roman North Africa, suggesting that the activity was undertaken by “a social group that had all the reasons to feel the independent past as a time decidedly better than living under the order imposed by Rome. This could have played a major role in forging a deliberately retro-reconstructed memory”; this was not “innate conservatism” but is rather to be “understood in the context of the inequalities created by the order imposed by Rome” (p. 302).

The collection rounds off with two chapters grouped under ‘Recapitulation and conclusions’, although both contributions offer useful case studies in their own right. Weiss-Krejci demonstrates how post-medieval kingdoms and states appropriated sites and material culture in order to create fictive lines of descent, and to secure political legitimacy. Maximilian I, for example, decreed that a Roman cremation urn be interred at Graz Castle and commemorated with an inscription linking the Habsburg monarchy to ancient Roman authority. Meanwhile, Bradley provides an overview of his work on Scottish stone circles. He identifies four different ‘pasts’, or phases of use, from 2000 BC to AD 600 with specific activities, wider contexts and associated meanings varying between them.

This is a valuable collection, adding geographic and chronological range to discussions of the ways in which memories are constructed and reconstructed through monumental forms. The case studies are diverse but cohere well. The text has been carefully edited and is supported by neatly reproduced illustrations and photographs.

Next, we cross the Atlantic with *Memory traces: analyzing sacred space at five Mesoamerican sites*, edited by KRISTAN-GRAHAM and AMRHEIN. This collection of six papers, plus introduction, derives from a Society for American Archaeology session that brought together art historians and archaeologists, although the latter did not ultimately contribute to the published volume. That absence perhaps explains the particular take on memory pursued. The Preface indicates that the book’s title refers to the work of the US land artist Robert Smithson, and in particular his explorations of “ruins in reverse” (p. xiv), juxtaposing ancient ruins (including Maya sites) and modern constructions. The emphasis of the volume, however, falls more solidly on the second part of the book’s title:

the analysis of sacred space. The editors discuss the range of concepts developed in the chapters, yet the word ‘memory’ is rarely used and the broader concept is absent from the key paragraph (p. xxi) summarising the volume’s purpose. Indeed, explicit discussion of memory is not as evident in the chapters as might have been expected; it is performance that emerges as the central theme. For example, Sarro and Robb explore wall painting at Teotihuacan in order to capture the experience and meaning of moving through the city’s residential compounds.

The two papers that engage most explicitly with memory are Kristan-Graham’s on ‘Building memories at Tula’, and that by Wren *et al.* on the colonial period. Kristan-Graham, looking partly to work on prehistoric Britain for inspiration, interprets buildings at Tula as “both homages to, and pastiches of, past and present buildings and landscapes; these spaces were sacred venues for rituals and activities where family, ancestry, and polity were equated and commemorated” (p. 82). Building 3, she suggests, can be understood as a symbolic *Tollan*, or place of origin, evoking a “foundation myth from which ruling peoples derived authority and links to ancestral, cultured people” (p. 92). Wren *et al.* examine ‘How indigenous portraits were moved, mutilated, and made Christian in New Spain’. The authors follow the ‘social life’ of two sculptures as they were “carved, venerated, neglected, discovered, moved, mutilated, recarved, reinterpreted, moved again, and then ensconced in a new setting” (p. 172). One of these is Tonina Monument 28, a portrait of a seventh-century AD ruler, which was truncated and converted into a font by Spanish friars. The authors look to the Old World to understand the friars’ motivations and methods. The mutilation of these monuments focused particularly on heads and thighs/legs—the latter holding deep ideological meaning in the Maya world—and proclaimed Spanish triumph and religious conversion. But at some point the truncated portrait-cum-font may have become problematic, for it was eventually removed from the church. Iconography is polysemic, and the desecrated statue may have become a colonial embarrassment.

Some ‘Final thoughts’ by Dunning and Weaver extract connecting themes—again making interesting points about the nature and experience of sacred space, but without much explicit consideration of memory. I trust that I have not misunderstood the editors’ intentions with their prominent use of the word in the book’s title. The discussion in

co-editor Kristan-Graham's own paper of such staples of memory studies as Halbwachs, Connerton and Küchler would suggest not. Regardless, the chapters provide interesting and useful analysis of sacred space and, especially, performance in the iconographically rich architectural spaces of Mesoamerica.

## Religious memory

RUBINA RAJA & JORG RÜPKE (ed.). *A companion to the archaeology of religion in the ancient world*. 2015. xiii+502 pages, several b&w illustrations. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell; 978-1-4443-5000-5 hardback £120.

BRIAN HOBLEY. *The circle of God. An archaeological and historical search for the nature of the sacred: a study of continuity*. 2015. v+807 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. 2015. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-78491-137-9 paperback £110.



Does memory have a material correlate, or is it primarily performative? This is clearly an issue of importance for archaeology, and for archaeologies of religion in particular. Another in the

Wiley-Blackwell series of companions, *A companion to the archaeology of religion in the ancient world*, edited by RAJA and RÜPKE, positions itself at the intersection of archaeology and religious studies. It presents 35 contributions on varied aspects of religious practice across the Graeco-Roman and late antique worlds. Unlike some recent handbooks, the editors provide an extended introduction explaining the rationale for the selection of topics. They place particular emphasis on religion as practised (orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy) and as documented through the archaeological evidence.

The chapters are divided into sections: 'Archaeology of ritual'; 'Embodiment'; 'Experiences'; 'Creating spaces of experience'; 'Designing and appropriating sacred space'; 'Sharing public space'; 'Expressiveness'; 'Agents'; and 'Transformation'. Memory, therefore, is not highlighted as a core theme and, although it is touched on in several chapters (including Weiss's contribution on 'Perpetuated action' linking ephemeral speech acts and monumental writing), its

presence is muted. This thematic variety helpfully reminds us that memory is neither a universal nor default interpretive framework for dealing with sacred or, more specifically, religious space. The chapter by Christopher Smith on 'Urbanization and memory', however, focuses directly on that theme in relation to republican Rome. He makes the case that personal and collective remembering are central to religious practices, but he also sounds a note of caution about both the intellectual origins of 'memory' and its interpretive limits. He questions, for example, the applicability to the ancient world of ideas advanced by Assmann and Ricoeur, on the basis that they were developed in response to particularly modern sensibilities. His case study of republican Rome links memory to the emergence of urbanism through architecture, calendars, spectacles and the decision to preserve, destroy or reconstruct sacred buildings as part of urban development. What is valuable here is that Smith makes explicit some of the assumptions about memory that lurk unstated behind papers in several of the other volumes under review.

Several contributions touch on memories of ancestors, especially Parker's 'Public and private' chapter and von Hesberg *et al.*'s 'Religion and tomb'. Other topics include amulets, anatomical *ex votos*, dance, processions and communal dining. Méniel takes us through the evidence for the gruesome sequence of 'Killing and preparing animals' for sacrifice at Gallic sanctuaries, and the chapters by Rüpke, and Mol and Versluis explore individual choice in religion and communal religious identity respectively. Ironically, the chapter on 'Images' offers only a single photograph, and the volume as a whole feels under-illustrated.

That visual sparseness stands in stark contrast to *The circle of God. An archaeological and historical search for the nature of the sacred: a study of continuity* by BRIAN HOBLEY. The title page of this enormous volume announces that it contains: "Over 400,000 words (excluding appendices); 800+ pages, 1,050 illustrations". The Contents alone are listed across nine pages, and the indices—one for the text and one for figure captions—take up 70 more. The hypothesis with which Hobley launches into this monumental work, however, is simple: "circularity in Greco-Roman and 'barbaric' western European art and architecture—whether in the form of a circle, sphere or related motifs may be not only decorative or structural, but also symbolic" (p. 10). Specifically, he aims to link circularity to the divine in the form of

universalism: a concept that seems to be undergoing a wider revival of interest.

To resolve all of this, Jenkins turns to an approach based on “what is best for the object, scholars, and the public: where is the artefact best preserved, best displayed, and best understood?” (pp. 248–49). Although the book is explicitly not intended to resolve specific cases, Jenkins takes the Elgin Marbles as an example of how the approach might work. Here, she reasons that the status quo works well: it allows the two parts of the collection—in the Acropolis Museum and the British Museum—to do different and complementary jobs. One provides the physical context through proximity to the original site, the other provides the broader context of world art influenced by the sculptures. If claims based on national ownership are set aside, she suggests, more is lost than gained by concentrating the objects in one place.

This is not just a book about repatriation. It also covers wider ‘culture wars’ and the rise of ‘identity museums’, the pros and cons of embedding archaeologists in war zones, and much more. The main concern expressed throughout is that “We have lost sight of what museums can do, whilst explicitly expecting them to achieve far more than is possible” (p. 322).

Her conclusions are stated in terms rather different from those in *Excavating memory*: “It is time to stop revelling in the wrongs of the past” (p. 323); “The mission of museums should be to acquire, conserve, research, and display their collections to all. That is all and that is enough” (p. 324). She continues, “The object should be at the centre of the museum, not you and me. The questions that should be at the heart of museums are these: who came before us, how did they live, what did they believe, what did they make, how did they make it, and what did these treasures mean?” (p. 324). Whether the proponents on either side of the repatriation debate can be reconciled through this line of argument is probably too much to hope. Jenkins, however, throws down questions that extend far beyond such issues and that merit serious discussion within and beyond museums.

If some issues around heritage, such as the Elgin Marbles, seem to have achieved stalemate, others are fast moving, such as the continuing human and cultural fall-out from the civil war in Syria. A news story about refugees who have fled to Germany being trained to guide visitors around Berlin’s museums is

too recent to have been included by Jenkins, but it surely illustrates her argument. For the project’s organisers found that the Syrian and Iraqi guides not only connected with objects acquired from the Middle East, such as the Ishtar Gate from Babylon, but also with displays about post-war Germany. Imagery of ruined German cities “gives them hope that destruction in war is not the end of history. For many, it is a kind of eye-opener, and it gives them hope for the future of their countries” (BBC News). Memory, as the monument builders of prehistoric Europe knew well, is as much about the future as it is about the past.

## References

- BBC News. Berlin museum tours inspire Mid-East refugees. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35976090> (accessed 3 May 2016).
- BRADLEY, R. 2012. *The idea of order: the circular archetype in prehistoric Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Books received

This list includes all books received between 1 March 2016 and 30 April 2016. Those featuring at the beginning of New Book Chronicle have, however, not been duplicated in this list. The listing of a book in this chronicle does not preclude its subsequent review in *Antiquity*.

## General

- LEE BRODERICK (ed.). *People with animals: perspectives and studies in ethnozoarchaeology*. 2016. vi+119 pages, numerous b&w illustrations. Oxford & Havertown (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-247-1 paperback £38.
- TOM BRUGHMANS, ANNA COLLAR & FIONA COWARD (ed.). *The connected past: challenges to network studies in archaeology and history*. 2016. xviii+200 pages, several b&w illustrations, 12 tables. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-874851-1 hardback £60.
- JOHN CHERRY & FELIPE ROJAS (ed.). *Archaeology for the people: Joukowsky Institute perspectives* (Joukowsky Institute Publication 7). 2015. xv+170 pages, several colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford & Havertown (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-107-8 paperback £28.

2006–2010. 2016. xi+238 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford & Philadelphia (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-111-5 hardback £45.

## Asia

ALICE YAO. *The ancient highlands of southwest China: from the Bronze Age to the Han Empire*. 2016. xi+270 pages, numerous b&w illustrations. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-936734-4 hardback £34.99.

## Africa and Egypt

FRANÇOIS G. RICHARD (ed.). *Materializing colonial encounters: archaeologies of African experience*. 2015. xi+307 pages, several colour and b&w illustrations. New York: Springer; 978-1-4939-2632-9 hardback \$179.

RICHARD H. WILKINSON & KENT WEEKS. *The Oxford handbook of the Valley of the Kings*. 2016. xvi+627 pages, several b&w illustrations. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-993163-7 hardback £97.

## Americas

BRIAN S. BAUER, MADELEINE HALAC-HIGASHIMORI & GABRIEL E. CANTARUTTI. *Voices from Vilcabamba: accounts chronicling the fall of the Inca Empire*. 2016. xi+234 pages, several b&w illustrations. Boulder: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-425-6 paperback \$28.95.

SCOTT R. HUTSON. *The ancient urban Maya: neighborhoods, inequality, and built form*. 2016. xiii+261 pages, several b&w illustrations, 4 tables. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6276-1 hardback \$84.95.

GYLES IANNONE, BRETT A. HOUK & SONJA A. SCHWAKE (ed.). *Ritual, violence, and the fall of the Classic Maya kings*. 2016. xv+361 pages, several b&w illustrations, 4 tables. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6275-4 hardback \$89.95.

SARAH KURNICK & JOANNE BARON (ed.). *Political strategies in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica*. 2016. xiii+291 pages, 36 b&w illustrations, 3 tables. Boulder: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-415-7 hardback \$60.

MARÍA ANTONIA NEGRETTE MARTÍNEZ. *Pointe de Caille. Desarrollo cultural postsaladoide en la isla de Saint Lucia* (MPK Band 83). 2015. 538 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations, tables. Vienna: Mitteilungen der Prähistorischen Kommission; 978-3-7001-7708-1 paperback €160

GLEN E. RICE. *Sending the spirits home: the archaeology of Hohokam mortuary practices*. 2016. xiv+262 pages, 89 b&w illustrations. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press; 978-1-60781-459-7 hardback \$60.

NEILL J. WALLIS & ASA R. RANDALL (ed.). *New histories of pre-Columbian Florida*. 2016. (First published in hardback, 2014.) ix+303 pages, several b&w illustrations, 6 tables. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6209-9 paperback \$27.95.

## Britain and Ireland

KENNETH BROPHY, GAVIN MACGREGOR & IAN B.M. RALSTON (ed.). *The Neolithic of mainland Scotland*. 2016. xvii+322 pages, numerous b&w illustrations, 4 tables. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 978-0-7486-8573-8 paperback £19.99.

MARTIN CARVER. *Portmahomack. Monastery of the Picts*. 2016. (Second edition, first published 2008.) xix+244 pages, 16 colour and 85 b&w illustrations. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 978-0-7486-9767-0 paperback £33.

CHIZ HARWARD, NATASHA POWERS & SADIE WATSON. *The upper Walbrook Valley cemetery of Roman London: excavations at Finsbury Circus, City of London, 1987–2007* (MOLA Monograph Series 69). 2015. xvi+210 pages, 141 colour and b&w illustrations, 60 tables. London: MOLA; 978-1-907586-25-5 hardback £25.

ANDY HOWARD, HENRY CHAPMAN & BENJAMIN GEAREY. *Down by the river: archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and geoarchaeological investigations of the Suffolk River valleys*. 2016. xiv+226 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford & Havertown (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-168-9 hardback £25.

ANTHONY MACKINDER. *Roman and medieval revetments on the Thames waterfront* (MOLA Archaeology Studies Series 33). 2015. xiv+137 pages, 91 colour and b&w illustrations, 16 tables. London: MOLA; 978-1-907586-30-9 paperback £15.

JACQUELINE I. MCKINLEY, MATT LEIVERS, JÖRN SCHUSTER, PETER MARSHALL, ALISTAIR BARCLAY & NICK STOODLEY. *Cliffs End Farm, Isle of Thanet, Kent* (Wessex Archaeology 31). 2015. xvii+318 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations, tables. Oxford & Havertown (PA): Wessex Archaeology; 978-1-874350-70-5 hardback £35.

KEITH RAY & IAN BAPT. *Offa's Dyke: landscape & hegemony in eighth-century Britain*. 2016. xvi+448 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford & Havertown (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-90511-935-6 paperback £29.95.

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