

and how thematic presentations of objects were used to tell stories to connect with visitors while education programming was developed to address further public needs. Annelies Van de Ven and Andrew Jamieson's contribution (Ch. 15) on the Classics and Archaeology Collection at the University of Melbourne advocates for inspiring a wide audience through object-based learning programs and establishing environments of co-creation and collaboration. Contributors throughout this part of the volume echo similar sentiments: the need for public engagement and social advocacy in museums.

Part V "Commentary" is comprised of a single chapter. Peter Lacovara provides a broad overview (Ch. 16) of American interest in the ancient world and focuses on how biblical narratives have affected the public perception of and interest in Middle Eastern collections in museums. Lacovara's contribution provides a synthesis of topics discussed by other contributors and concludes by suggesting that museums should advocate for the protection of Middle Eastern cultural heritage and should continue to be critical of acquisition policy and interpretation.

As noted by the editors in the first chapter, it is rather surprising that the colonial roots and histories of collecting practices in museums of Europe and North America were never addressed by the contributors. In many cases, it is clear that curators present and reflect on their institutional histories with a sense of nostalgia, which is disconcerting and can often lead to the representation of inaccurate history for the consumption of the general public. While the editors make mention of the idea of "decolonization" and advocate for "international curatorial relations" (p. 10), this idea and term is only mentioned one other time throughout the volume (see p. 172). Given that each author was asked to provide a brief summary of their institution's history and collection, it seems like this was a missed opportunity to engage in a much-needed discussion about the ethics of early colonial collecting practices and the curator's ethical responsibility to provide accurate contextual information about the exhibited collection to the public. Fortright discussions of early collecting practices can be challenging, and perhaps those conversations would have proven a bit beyond the scope of this volume, and would be better suited for

future scholarly debate and publications. Nevertheless, the historical information provided about these institutions and their collections is valuable and will hopefully inspire curators and scholars to continue to question and improve upon their analysis and curation of this material.

One critique is that the images, at times, were lacking in resolution and quality. Nevertheless, *Museums and the Ancient Middle East: Curatorial Practice and Audiences* provides a refreshing perspective by leading scholars and museum professionals on matters regarding curatorial and exhibition practices, collection research, and public education that is much needed and long overdue within the discipline of ancient Near Eastern studies. The editors and contributors should be commended for the thoughtful analysis of their personal and institutional curatorial practices. This level of reflection and inquiry about best standards and practices within the disciplines of museum studies and Near Eastern studies is important and vital to the continued successful engagement between museums and the public. This volume lays the groundwork for future discussions regarding museum ethics, collection practices, collaborative research, and cultural advocacy concerning material culture from the ancient Middle East, and it will likely inspire subsequent dialog and publications.

***Relational Identities and Other-Than-Human Agency in Archaeology.* Edited by Eleanor Harrison-Buck and Julia A. Hendon.**

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This edited book explores the meaning of relational personhood and other-than-human agency through nine chapters, each dealing with a specific case study. The volume also includes an introduction by the two editors and a concluding chapter by Harrison-Buck.

The editors' introduction situates personhood and nonhuman agency in archaeological theory and practice, which are defined as two interrelated "problem domains." On the one hand, nonhuman or other-than-human agency (used interchangeably through the volume) include animals, organisms, and other tangible and intangible phenomena. They are defined as social actors who possess a life force and qualities of personhood capable of producing change in the world. Human-object relations through the volume are understood as unstable and continuously changing and are highly influenced by the key concepts of meshwork and knots (Ingold), nodes (Joyce and Gillespie), bundles (Pauketat), or assemblages. On the other hand, personhood is defined as relational and as an ongoing engagement in which intersubjectivity and embodied experiences are essential features. Studying humans and other-than-humans as co-equals from an archaeological point of view is necessary to break dichotomies like the human/object or Western-colonial/indigenous ones. Each chapter revolves around these ideas, presenting a wide diversity of cases chronologically and geographically. They are organized geographically, beginning in the Americas (Chs. 2–7), moving through Australia (Ch. 8) and Africa (Ch. 9), and ending in Europe (Ch. 10).

In Chapter 2, Erica Hill studies the concepts of agency and personhood on proto- and early historic Yup'ik and Inupiaq Eskimos of Alaska on the coastal region of the Bering Sea through zooarchaeological depots, imagery, and oral narratives. She argues that these cultural groups distinguished between persons and agential non-persons in several ways. First, Eskimo social persons are humans and other-than-humans are mostly prey animals. Two features of the social persons are reciprocity and negotiation; human and animal persons interact through values of reciprocity, empathy, and respect. Second, agential nonpersons neither obey the rules nor belong to the society and are considered unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Thus, they do not possess the capacity of sociability and reciprocity. Examples of agential nonpersons include cannibal babies and disembodied hands, mouths, or heads. Although they are agents, they do not have the capacity to be persons as they do not participate in the social rules and taboos. In all, this case study

exemplifies clearly the distinction between personhood and agency: whereas "agents and persons could act, only persons can interact" (p. 23).

Chapter 3 deals with the proto- and early historic contact period in the American Maritimes (from the Gaspé Peninsula in eastern Quebec to southeastern Massachusetts). Megan Howey focusses on the groups Mi'kmaq and Maliseet, whose universe was filled with an animating spirit called *mntu*. These groups were the first in North America to encounter and become involved in trade networks with Europeans. One of the main objects of this interaction were copper and copper-colored kettles, especially the so-called "trade kettles." For the Mi'kmaq the copper kettles had sensory qualities, possessed *mntu*, and were deposited in burial sites. Two patterns of inclusion have been distinguished in the site of Hopps or Pictou in current Nova Scotia: damaged kettles out of contact with human remains and intact kettles placed purposely in direct contact with bodies. The latter present protective features, but have to be complete in order to transfer their life force to the human deceased. They embody conditions of personhood not only because they are connected to indigenous values attributed to copper in the pre-contact period, but also because they are considered as beings who assisted the dead in the afterworld. In all, this chapter focusses on the materiality of other-than-human agency showing that this is not an abstract concept; as the author recognizes "other-than-human relations in past societies do not require us to leave the material" (p. 67).

The study by Timothy Pauketat and Susan Alt (Ch. 4) explains the process of "Mississippianization" in and around the great American Indian city of Cahokia between ca. AD 900–1100. Following post-humanist perspectives, they argue that relations are physical properties, experiential qualities and movements of substances or materials that are associated to others, and define not only people but also organisms, things, or places. This approach is applied to maize agriculture, pottery production, and mound building, all of them participating in a radical social transformation that took place across the central Mississippi River basin. These changes are not exclusively technological advances but also active and enmeshed agents in the Mississippianization of people.

Throughout the chapter, the authors connect different elements like water, shells, fire, or maize and show how they are agentive as they are entangled with each other and with people.

The authors of Chapter 5 focus on the agency of birds among native groups of the Northern Plains tribes of the Missouri River basin. They look at birds' value as having the status of gods (thunderbird) and "wingeds" or people of the air. They argue that birds are agents of social prestige and political power. The case of eagle feathers is explained in detail: they are highly appreciated and considered an honorable gift. Feathers are considered persons as they carry the inalienable power of eagle and thunderbird used for several ceremonies and trade. The key concept *transfer* allows spreading the power of gods to person and groups and things and, at the same time, the power and knowledge is not lost to the giver unless the rules that accompany it are broken.

The American section ends with two chapters on Maya culture. Matthew Looper (Ch. 6) understands the agency of objects as their capacity to express power and do active things. He explains how Maya people associated various specific sculptural materials (e.g., jade) with divine essences and gods. He includes shell and describes the Cleveland shell plaque, depicting a male lord wearing a deer headdress and smoking a cigar. Looper argues that agency is performed in three ways: the text inscribed on the surface of the shell plaque, the depicted conch shell, and the material qualities of the conch-shell piece. The main idea of this contribution is to reinforce that agency depends upon both discourse and materiality: by cutting, inscribing, and reciting the texts on the shell plaques agency is created; so that, as indicated in the title, ancient Maya objects have agentive voices.

Following the examples of object-based agency, Julia Hendon (Ch. 7) analyses the agency of Mayan tools, specifically spindle whorls and grindstones. Through ethnographic and visual scenes of the Postclassic and Contact periods, Hendon argues that these objects can have potentially the qualities of personhood, which are agency, animacy, possession of a soul, the ability to form relations with others, and intersubjectivity. For instance, grindstones are agents capable of causing things to happen and harming those who mistreated them; in the

same vein, textiles are considered to be born rather than crafted and to present body parts like the head or butts. Finally, the practice of depositing objects related to crafting in domestic contexts makes clear that these objects deserved a proper way to be discarded. Hendon's chapter makes clear the need to avoid anthropocentrism when identifying agency and personhood.

Ian McNiven (Ch. 8) concentrates on sailing canoes of the Torres Strait Islanders of northeast Australia. To him, canoes are object-beings and this understanding of the boats is defined as a course of different steps throughout the entire lifecycle. He identifies four socialization processes: anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, intentionalization, and predatorization. The transformation begins with the careful selection of a tree and its ritual chopping. After that, the canoes are anthropomorphed and zoomorphed by adding different elements charged with anatomical features (e.g., eyes to see dugongs and turtles). In addition, canoes are intentionalized and predatorialized by inscribing representations of predatory fishes onto canoes, attaching hunting magic charms, or giving specific names. These acts embody the canoes as sentient beings possessing lightness and speed. Both qualities are appreciated by islanders, whose identity and social world are intimately connected with the sea.

The next chapter (Ch. 9) deals with the agency of objects in the Banda area of west-central Ghana between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries AD. Ann Stahl explains the results of the Banda Research Project in relation to the consideration of objects labelled as "ornaments"—bangles, rings, and beads among others. She claims that this label hides their agency and that ornamenting bodies, human or not, is more than a representational act. Based on Warnier's concept of "techniques of the subject," this contribution explores how personhood is produced through a subject's relations with things. A mimesis between the iron serpentine bangles and rings with pythons is highlighted; the coiled and serpentine shape of these objects evoke movement, and this animal is a ritually charged agent in negotiating human well-being. In addition, the relational connection between pythons—constrictor vertebrae—and ornaments is also signaled in shrine clusters. In conclusion, serpents and objects that resemble snakes are agentive nonhumans

because the two participate actively in practices of well-being.

The last case study (Ch. 10) revolves around fossils in British Early Bronze Age burials. The authors, Joanna Brück and Andrew Meirion Jones, seek to go beyond the Euro-American notions of individuality that consider grave goods as representations of status and prestige of the deceased. Instead, they argue that natural and modified fossils might be linked to a remote ancestral period and, thus, were cosmologically charged. Another example of this are the clay vessels that resemble echinoid fossils through the addition of applied balls with a grape-like appearance. These objects and their location make clear that persons were ontologically entangled with them, an association that challenges the Western dichotomy between culture/nature or animate/inanimate.

The book ends with a complex chapter by Harrison-Buck that examines critically some ideas about personhood and agency. A first point to highlight is that agents and persons are not synonymous. There are agentive nonpersons or agent-objects. Thus, agents are not inherently persons (humans or otherwise). Another relevant point that arises from the chapters is the understanding of agency as generative action that brings things to life. In this sense, the author uses the label of “crafting persons” to stress the important role of the process of making rather than the finished product in giving life and potency to certain objects. Based in neuroscience studies, the author also criticizes the idea that relational personhood is a socially learned concept and advocates that it ontologically exists prior to social learning; so, humans and nonhumans are relationally constituted at birth. In the same vein, she defends the idea of embodied cognition or mind, explaining that the mind is connected to the body, but bodily experiences also influence the mind in a mutually constitutive manner. In all, the contributions to this volume reinforce this approach because “thinking and doing are co-creative conditions in the formation of agency, materiality, and personhood” (p. 276).

This book provides stimulating discussions about topics currently trending in archaeological debates, such as the so-called ontological turn, or post-humanist perspectives. The case studies presented here concentrate

on specific questions like who is considered a person or how personhood is acquired or what values rule relations among persons. However, the inclusion of difficult jargon and references to theoretical concepts and methodological perspectives of other scholars across the chapters make it difficult to follow some of the arguments. In addition, the book is not balanced with regard to the case studies, given the dominance of American examples from recent periods. The bias certainly is explainable since the extant sources for the study of Native American societies are particularly rich and varied. In this situation, the inclusion of a prehistoric context such as Bronze Age Britain is very stimulating, as it opens new avenues of research and methodologies for the European past. Overall, the book offers highly recommendable lessons and is truly thought-provoking, not only for archaeologists concerned with issues of agency and personhood, but also for those interested in archaeological theory.

***Archaeology and Archaeological Information in the Digital Society.* Edited by Isto Huvila.**

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Archaeology and Archaeological Information in the Digital Society, edited by Isto Huvila, brings together a range of studies by archaeologists and information scientists to examine the implications of digital technologies on archaeological interpretation and how we engage with the past. Digital data collection and the embedding of digital media in interpretation and presentation means that archaeologists are all engaging in some way in “digital society.” This volume highlights the various and many ways that we do so, and how digital technologies impact how we interface with archaeology—from field data collection to archiving to public presentation.