

Reviews

Laurajane Smith. *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*, Routledge, New York, 2004; xi + 260p, paperback. ISBN 0-415-31833-5. Price US\$40.95.

In this book, Laurajane Smith examines the underlying archaeological theory behind current cultural heritage management (CHM) practice and how this has shaped the discipline as a whole, as well as the relationship between Indigenous peoples and archaeologists. The author specifically contrasts and compares the development of archaeological theory and CHM practices in the United States and Australia and shows how archaeology can be used to define and regulate social identities.

The book is divided into ten chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the book's scope, as well as the theoretical context for the main arguments. Taking a personal approach, the author expresses how her experiences as an archaeologist have influenced her opinions and the position she presents in this book. Chapter 2 details the history of social politics and Indigenous cultural identity in both countries. This includes the increase in the awareness of indigenous rights that occurred in the 1960s in the United States and Australia that brought about increased Indigenous criticisms of archaeology. Chapter 3 examines the development of archaeological theory since the 1960s, and the ways in which different schools of archaeological thought have affected CHM practices. Chapter 4 looks at the theoretical framework of social sciences in general and how they can demonstrate the social impacts that archaeology can have. This is examined further in Chapter 5, detailing archaeology's rise to claim the prominent position it holds today of stewardship of the past and especially the past of other peoples. It also discusses how CHM has contributed to the idea of archaeologists as stewards of the past. Chapter 6 discusses the inter-relationship between archaeological theory and CHM, especially in the area of defining the significance of sites. The development and role of CHM legislation in the United States and Australia is discussed in Chapter 7, and shows how archaeological theory and CHM are used to govern material culture and social identity. Chapter 8 examines the first of the book's case studies, the conflict over the remains of Kennewick Man in the United States. This case study details how wider political and social issues can get caught up in and influence archaeological practice. Chapter 9 looks at how archaeological practices in Tasmania have shaped both the cultural identity of indigenous Tasmanians as well as CHM policy in that state. The final chapter concludes the arguments put forth in the previous chapters.

In concentrating on the history of the often stormy relationship between archaeologists and indigenous peoples, the book focuses on the influence of processual theory. The two case studies discussed – Kennewick Man and Tasmania – provide examples of processual thought and how it can affect Indigenous peoples. Kennewick Man shows how the underlying processual idea of archaeology as a positivistic science has resulted in the rejection of other, non-empirical forms of knowledge (i.e. indigenous oral histories). In the case of Tasmania, positivistic archaeological knowledge was used by policy-makers to interpret the indigenous history of Tasmania, much of which has been actively disputed by Indigenous Tasmanians. While case studies that involve aspects of processual theory are of course crucial to the overall argument of this book, this reviewer feels that the author has largely overlooked how post-processual theory has impacted on both CHM practice and the relationship between archaeologists and indigenous peoples. The handling of the

1996 discovery and subsequent scientific study of 9000 year old human remains in Alaska provides a nice contrast to the furore that erupted over Kennewick Man (see Fifield 1996, Fifield et al. 1998). While post-processual theory is a relative latecomer in the story of the development of CHM and archaeology, it still should be examined in the context of Smith's argument in greater detail.

Overall, this book is an interesting study of the power and politics within and surrounding archaeological practice. Smith has shown how archaeologists cannot afford to think of themselves as working in a vacuum, their work only affecting the archaeological database. The impacts that archaeology has had on indigenous cultural and social identity, as well as perceptions of indigenous people in the wider community, is something all archaeologists need to be aware of. After all, if you do not learn from history, you are doomed to repeat it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Burke, H. and C. Smith, *The Archaeologist's Field handbook*. Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2004; xxii + 406 pages; paperback; ISBN 1 86508 862 5. Price Aust\$49.95.

In a world brimming with training manuals and dummies guides, producing a new compendium on archaeological field practice is a daunting task. The quality of presentation expected by the present generation with its predilection for slick style and bite-sized formatting, often over high quality of information, makes it a perilous exercise for archaeologists who on the whole operate in a conservative medium with a heavy reliance on traditional tools and approaches. The good news is that in *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook*, Heather Burke and Claire Smith deliver many palpable hits, and achieve an admirable balance between content and presentation style.

Written primarily for archaeology undergraduates, the strong emphasis on flexibility and ethical accountability positions this handbook on a superior level to most archaeology manuals, which often rely on slavish adherence to standards – sometimes at the expense of effective problem solving and communication.

And communicate is something this book does very well. It is written in a highly accessible, almost conversational style, making it possible to read through at a single sitting. Given the vast array of topics covered, its readability is a formidable success in its own right.

Each chapter is well laid out, with the main learning outcomes presented at the beginning and a useful list of

relevant readings at the end. The presentation of techniques is a little two-paced at times, however, with some procedures finely detailed whilst others are glossed over (i.e. recording stone artefacts versus maritime archaeology). There are also some bumpy moments with the ordering of topics within a few chapters, such as in Chapter 7 (Recording Indigenous Sites), and Chapter 8 (Managing Cultural Heritage). Chapter 8 in particular might have been slightly better structured under the standard headings: issues, policies, strategies and implementation. The information is all there, although the summary dot points blend policy, strategy and implementation issues, which ideally should be covered in different stages of the conservation planning process.

For the technically minded there are a few minor errors, such as the discussion on camera basics (larger aperture = faster shutter speed), while the reference to contact methods for recording rock art may raise a few conservators' eyebrows.

Possibly because of having read the book in one go, I felt the information flow might have been streamlined by a slightly different chapter order, such as placing site excavation after historic and indigenous recording, and before photography and illustration, followed by managing heritage and interpretation/publication. This would take the reader from the big to the small picture more in keeping with the usual trajectory of archaeological process, although the cross referencing helps maintain coherence with the current structure. In general, the structural and specific technical negatives are minor compared with the encyclopaedic scope of practical wisdoms that the book makes accessible through the authors' enjoyable writing style and excellent supporting graphics.

The appendices similarly contain a useful array of recording forms, basic artefact dating guides and planning aids, although some of the more routinely used forms might be helpfully integrated into the text.

On a practical level the book is attractively priced, although one wonders whether the paperback format will stand up to the rigours of fieldwork as well as a cloth or plastic hardcover.

If there is a significant limitation with the handbook, and to some degree it is an understandable one, it is the (implied) reliance on shoestring budget/low tech techniques as the mainstay of archaeological practice. This is sound insofar as it highlights the importance of fundamental principles, however, increasingly archaeology graduates are entering a workplace where there is an expectation that their work will integrate

with engineering and other highly refined technical information. This places pressure on students and practitioners to also be familiar with more advanced data capture and visualisation techniques, such as laser scanning and remote sensing. There will always be room for archaeological handcraft on small projects with minimal dependencies, and the tips from practicing archaeologists within the handbook add invaluable extending wisdom. However, if research and commercial archaeology are to keep pace with the other environmental management and interpretive disciplines, at some point standard manuals will need to engage more robustly with the expectations of end users.

To be fair, *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook* does not set out to be an advanced technical manual, although in covering the ground that it does it brings into sharp focus where further disciplinary growth is required. It should be remembered that this is the first major attempt in two decades to summarise Australasian archaeological field methods. It is almost beyond argument that much of what constitutes the broad palette of current archaeological field practice has developed in a procedural vacuum. It should come as no surprise therefore that not everyone involved in Australasian archaeology will necessarily use or agree with all of the procedures and processes outlined in the handbook. This is not a failing of the book but a reflection of the inevitably chaotic way the discipline has evolved in the interim, and a litmus test of the work that lies ahead in standardising and updating the tools of archaeological general practice. The book underscores the current status of the discipline quite honestly and proclaims 'we are here now'. This is important to know, but it is also necessary to scope out where archaeology must go to maintain its relevance in the modern world. Thanks to Burke and Smith we have a practical foundation for a disciplinary gap analysis. For this reason *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook* should be compulsory reading for all Australasian archaeologists, as the coverage and emphasis of topics amply qualify as a songsheet for the review and future tuning of Australasian field methods.

The authors should be congratulated for undertaking such a broad survey and producing a timely and useful slice through current practice. As a compendium of collective wisdom and basic tools it provides a valuable review of things archaeologists should already know and a signpost for things we must continue to learn.

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