

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Archaeologies of Memory*

Archaeologies of Memory. (Ed.) Van Dyke, R.M., Alcock, S.E. Blackwell Publishers Ltd., London, 2003

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Archaeology is mostly about memory or remembering, both in the longer and the shorter-term, usually about things which we have collectively forgotten. The title of this work suggests that the artefacts which archaeologists deal with are memories of a kind no less. Even so the subject matter is intriguing. This new book is divided into three parts. The first is called Memory Studies with Access to Texts and has the following essays: Echoes of Empire: Vijayanagar and Historical Memory, Vijayanagar as Historical Memory by Carla M. Sinopoli. Memories Materiality: Ancestral Presence, Commemorative Practice and Disjunctive Locales by Lynn Meskell. Memory Tattered and Torn: Spolia in the Heartland of Byzantine Hellenism by Amy Papalexandrou. Glories of the Past in the Past: Ritual Activities at Palatial Ruins in Early Iron Age Crete by MiekePrent. Concrete Memories: Fragments of the Past in the Classic Maya Present (500–1000 AD) by Rosemary A. Joyce. Part II of this book is called Memory Studies in Prehistory. Creating Memory in Prehistory: The Engraved Slate Plaques of Southwest Iberia by Katina T. Lillios. Mounds, Memory, and Contested Mississippian History by Timothy R. Puketat and Susan M. Alt. Memory and the Construction of Chacoan Society by Ruth M. Van Dyke. Part III of this work has two essays, Caveats and Commentaries. The Familiar Honeycomb: Byzantine Era Reuse of Sicily's Prehistoric Rock Cut Tombs by Emma Blake. The work has two excellent essays by way of an introduction to the work by the and a concluding essay called Translation of Time by Richard Bradley.

This reviewer has some previous familiarity with the archaeological work of this genre (Bradley 1994, 2002), which breaks new ground in as much as they are concerned with what was understood of the past by human groups before us. The idea of how the peoples or societies of the past may have used material objects as a means for remembering de-centers pleasantly the arrogance of contemporary historians and archaeologists about the indispensable role they play in contemporary society insofar as the arts of remembering are concerned!

Thus stated, the theme of this book would seem to imply that remembering the past has not significantly

been the business of contemporary societies alone. It was a preoccupation of past societies as well, perhaps all the way into prehistory, since human origins. Yet, to what degree and how this was done, is remarkably well explained in this work.

The editors Van Dyke and Alcock suggest in their introduction to this work that "This collection of essays is intended to explore the uses "of past in the past" from a wide range of archaeological perspectives... through different means, employing varying combinations of texts, oral traditions, iconographic representations, heirlooms, and visible remains on the landscape... In spite of this diversity, the papers share certain common themes. All engage with social memory, the construction of a collective notion (not an individual belief) about the way things were in the past... Social memory is nowhere here perceived as monolithic, but as variable by gender, ethnicity, class, religion or other salient factors, allowing for a multiplicity, and possible conflict, of memories in any society. Also central to the volume is the acceptance of the mutability of social memory, the recognition that it emerges and evolves from acts of both remembering and forgetting. Finally, the essays are committed to the notion that archaeology, and in some cases only archaeology, can do much to illuminate how people in the past conceived their past, and perceived their present and future." (p. 1–2)

Little doubt then remains in the reviewer's mind about the seriousness of the intention of the work, and indeed it does seem to live up to its stated aims and purpose.

Going by the lack of such analyses, to the best of the reviewer's knowledge, published on the Indian scene by Indian archaeologists, it is worth wondering why we stop short of theorizing despite a sea of such data. In an ideal world the ample archaeological data in India - by way of rock art, for example - should have created an ideal ground for such theories, and not for an aversion to it. Or is it that Indian publishers do not look upon such research as marketable? The fact remains, however, that all of the studies of this work, titles already cited above, present exhaustive research done by their authors.

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