

BOOK REVIEW

## A Review of *Nature and Antiquities: The Making of Archaeology in the Americas*

*Nature and Antiquities: The Making of Archaeology in the Americas*, by Philip Kohl, Irina Podgorny and Stefanie Gänger (Eds.), Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 248 pages, \$60 US, 2014, ISBN: 9780816531127

Tim Murray\*

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This book derives from a Wenner-Gren seminar “The Naturalization of the Past: Nation-Building and the Development of Anthropology and Natural History in the Americas” which was held in 2002. At its core is a consideration of how the human history of the pre-European Americas came to be written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a project made the more interesting by the fact that for much of the 300 or so years before then the original inhabitants were thought to be ‘without history’. There is nothing particularly original in this, beyond the important consideration of human history through the study of nature as well as the study of antiquities. This focus supports the exploration of some interesting related issues – the development of languages of description and explanation (essentially issues related to archaeological epistemology), the articulation of perspectives of a number of disciplines within and outside anthropology, a concern with documenting collection practices by what might be regarded as amateur archaeologists or antiquarians, or by museums, and a clear understanding that archaeology in the Americas took a long time to be ‘made’ into something formal and more generally agreed-upon. Significantly there are some very strong resonances with the history of archaeology in other parts of the world beyond Europe – the interplay between ‘metropolitan’ and ‘colonial’ concerns, the importance of collection as the basis for documenting culture locally,

and through the act of comparison with other places and times, fixing its place within the human story.

Enhancing our understanding of colonial science in the Americas is an entirely worthy goal, and it is clear that the editors (and many of the contributors) are alive to the importance of seeing broader ‘imperial’ or ‘colonial’ patterns that existed across the colonial world. Of course much of what has been collected here would have had a significantly greater impact on the history of archaeology if the publication had appeared earlier – 14 years is a long hiatus – but there is much of value nonetheless. Following the very measured and thoughtful introduction are 10 papers arranged in three thematic parts – Interplays, Settings, and Narratives, where some of the broader comparative agendas, be they the interplay of between the different fields of knowledge that encompassed the American past, or fine-grained studies of individuals or institutions, or more general discussions of indigeneity and the political context of research into the human history of the Americas. This makes reading the volume as a whole rather than cherry-picking papers a really rewarding experience.

Production values are generally good. The text is mercifully free of typos, though the reproduction of the figures erred on the fuzzy. This pretty minor issue aside, *Nature and Antiquities* stands as an enlightening contribution to the history of archaeology (and related disciplines) in the Americas.

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### Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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