

*Making Alternative Histories. The Practice of Archaeology and History in Non-Western Settings*, edited by Peter R. Schmidt and Thomas C. Patterson, School of American Research Press: Santa Fe NM. xvi+312. ISBN 0-933452-93-4 (paper).

by

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For most of the last decade archaeologists have been explicitly engaged in a gradually intensifying dialogue with the marginalised and the dispossessed in society. It is fair to say that this dialogue has been difficult and stressful for all concerned, but then again it is also true to say that no one ever thought that it was going to be easy. There have been many consequences of the failures and successes which have happened along the way, some very positive, others much less so, but apart from observing that it is still far too early to write the history of archaeology in society, it seems self evident that the discipline has been changed forever, and that it is understood to have been so by many of its practitioners.

Reading *Making Alternative Histories*, after the experience of such intensity is a curious experience, because the essence of the argument presented by Schmidt and Patterson has been made many times before, albeit in other places and with other representatives of the marginalised and dispossessed. Certainly the World Archaeology Congress and the One World Archaeology Series (now published by Routledge) have been the most overt exponents of the principles being argued for in this book. On this basis one might be tempted to observe that there is at least a very real question about whether we need to hear the argument all over again, and that whoever remained unconvinced of the need for such engagement was probably beyond conviction.

But there is more to this book than another set of case studies arguing for the importance of non-Western perspectives and approaches, or rehearsing yet more examples of oppression and appropriation (although these are present here too). In the Introduction Schmidt and Patterson argue that anthropological archaeology as practiced in North America has been anti-history in the sense that its practitioners have asserted a strong distinction between doing science and making history. It is somewhat disconcerting to find that false assumptions such as these (which I thought that Bruce Trigger, among others, had laid to rest nearly twenty years ago) could still have paradigmatic status in North America. Schmidt and Patterson make a number of sensible points about the pitfalls which are created by the maintenance of such a false dichotomy, and go on to discuss the real value history has for anthropological archaeology as a springboard for dealing with diversity and (of course) change.

Nine chapters follow which elaborate the basic message that doing science does not necessarily involve laying waste to non-Western perspectives and that, indeed, the "margins" have much to offer the "centre" in this. Drawn mostly from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa these chapters outline the great significance of local context in the conceptualization of the nature and purpose of archaeology. In some there is the predictable influence of the State in the manufacture of particular kinds of histories, in others (such as Augustin Holl's interesting discussion of the work of Cheik Anta Diop) a basis for seeking a more nuanced understanding of the consequences of post colonial discourse is provided. There are some fine moments here - Handsman and Richmond on the Mahican and Schaghticoke Peoples, Blakey's very useful and timely discussion of Afrocentrism, and Chatterjee's significant study of Bengali historiography - allow *Making Alternative Histories* to be transformed from the ho-hum into a very solid contribution to our understanding of what doing archaeology in society can (and should) entail.

The final chapter is devoted to a discussion by the philosopher Alison Wylie of the relationships between politics and science. Much of the very sensible argument (made elsewhere by her and by others) is based on a consideration of whether the conceptual tools of oppression (which in the past has included Western science) can be transformed into the instruments of liberation. Wylie is perhaps more aware than the other contributors to this volume that this issue cannot be resolved by appealing to stock versions of positivist or post-positivist philosophy of science, and that little can be considered to be cut and dried. The fundamental questions raised by a consideration of how knowledge is produced and justified are not, and cannot be, resolved simply by calling for a commitment to listening to the "Other", especially when it is at the expense of a rigorous and fearless use of the principles of empirical inquiry. In the end (as has been argued since the Enlightenment) rationality and liberation are not mutually exclusive and that while this might be uncomfortable for some, the alternatives leave us in a much greater mess.

*Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology*, edited by Paul G. Bahn, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996, vii-xiii+386 pages.

by

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*The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology* is another in a series of volumes devoted to the history of archaeology that have appeared in recent time. Paul Bahn, the editor of the volume, has broken down his coverage of the history of worldwide archaeology into the following arrangement: "The Archaeology of Archaeology", "Old Worlds and New, 1500-1760", "Antiquarians and Explorers, 1760-1820", "Science and Romanticism, 1820-1860", "The Search for Human Origins, 1860-1920", "Archaeology Comes of Age, 1920-1960", "New Techniques and Competing Philosophies, 1960-1990", and "Current Controversies and Future Trends". Bahn's volume explores many of the major developments in archaeological practice from both in the classical world and as from the practice of archaeology in the Americas. The volume even gives the reader a glimpse into the origins and growth of archaeology in New Zealand. Of particular interest is coverage of the history of early archaeological efforts having to do with early studies of human origins. This topic is rarely part of any published history of archaeology and the reader will greatly benefit from the discussion. The reader is also given an excellent discussion of many of the well-known and less well-known discoveries in both the ancient and New Worlds. The text of the volume is supported with excellent illustrations and rare photographs/paintings of early archaeologists. On the whole the volume is an excellent introduction to the origins and development of archaeology and will serve as a good starting point to learn more by students having an interest in the history of science, particularly in the history of archaeology. This volume is recommended to become a part of the reference collections of libraries in universities and colleges.