

V. Book reviews

A. MacGregor (ed.) 2008. *Sir John Evans 1823–1908. Antiquity, Commerce and Natural History in the Age of Darwin*. Ashmolean Museum: Oxford. 326 pages; ISBN 1854442376 (hbk).

Reviewed by **Tim Murray**

This splendid book celebrates the centenary of the death of that remarkable Victorian antiquary, Sir John Evans. It is the product of the Sir John Evans Centenary Project based in the Ashmolean Museum (where Evans' wonderful collection of antiquities and his private papers are held). The Ashmolean was indeed fortunate to secure the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, whose handsome photographic portrait adorns the volume. The book is beautifully produced and its contributions are greatly enhanced by the liberal use of the Evans archive.

Sir John Evans 1823–1908. Antiquity, Commerce and Natural History in the Age of Darwin (hereafter *Evans*) comprises 13 chapters, broken into 4 Parts. Part V contains three appendixes (one of which, Appendix 2, is a bibliography of his work). The organisation is generally clear and sensible. Two introductory chapters canvass Evans as polymath antiquary and collector and businessman. Part II (Scientist and Archaeologist) presents 5 chapters variously discussing Evans' scientific researches (particularly in geology and palaeontology) and his much better known antiquarian work in stone, bronze and iron. Part III in 3 chapters considers Evans the numismatist and focuses on British, Roman and English coinage. Thus far things have unfolded in a predictable (but quite satisfying) way. Part IV (Crossing borders, crossing disciplines) pulls back from the specifics of Evans and his antiquarian pursuits to a broader consideration of his role in 19th century science in general and archaeology in particular. His friendship with that other arch-antiquary John Lubbock is explored within the broader context of the rise of Darwinism, his role internationalising antiquarian studies is explored (particularly in terms of his links with Scandinavian scholars), and his part in the controversy concerning high human antiquity is given a fresh twist through an analysis of his sketches from the Somme and other key archaeological provinces. These last essays conclude *Evans* in a very satisfying way.

It is now frequently observed that there is something of a boom in research and publishing in the history of archaeology. This collection is a welcome addition, especially as it does much to restore the place of one of the true pioneers of prehistoric archaeology, while at the same time helping us to see him within his Victorian context. Perhaps best of all the contributions make it very clear what a treasure trove the Evans Archive is at the Ashmolean.

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Acta Archaeologica Supplementa: Birth of a World Museum, Volume 78. T. B. Jakobsen (Contributing Editor); ISBN: 978-1-4051-8571-4; Hardcover; 340 pages; 2008, Wiley-Blackwell.

Reviewed by **Tim Murray**

It has long been understood that the Danish National Museum (founded 200 years ago) has played a major role in the history of archaeology. This book, the consequence of Jakobsen's PhD dissertation, is published by Acta Archaeologica as a celebration of that milestone. The Copenhagen Museum (and the truly awe-inspiring documentation of Danish archaeological sites that is housed in its archives) is an institution of the first importance, and Jakobsen and her collaborators have done it proud.

The bulk of this wonderful book is an extended essay: ‘The Origins of the National Museum of Denmark 1807–1848. An Account of the Years of the Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities Based on the Commission’s Minute Books’. In it we have the best discussion to date of the history of Danish archaeology during those vital years before the revolution that swept Europe in 1848. Jakobsen has mined the minute-books of the Royal Commission to great effect, providing significant detail as well as assured synthesis. It’s a significant achievement that is enhanced by high quality production of the many illustrations that grace the text.

Jakobsen’s account is supported by two editorial appendices. The first, written by Fischer-Hansen, examines the role of Frederik Münter in the establishment of the Royal Commission. Although only short it provides important contextual detail concerning the influence of antiquarian scholarship in Sicily on Münter, who acted as a vector for ideas about the investigation and management of antiquity to move from Sicily to Denmark. The second appendix presents a very brief history of the Royal Society of Nordic Antiquities. The volume is completed by the publication (in Danish) of a transcription of the minute books of the Royal Commission.

Susan Pearce (ed.) 2007. *Visions of Antiquity. The Society of Antiquaries of London 1707–2007*. 488 pages; ISBN 9780854312870 (hbk). 116 photographs and line drawings in colour and b&w.

Reviewed by **Tim Murray**

2007 was a bumper year for institutional histories, with the Society of Antiquaries of London celebrating its tercentenary, and the Danish National Museum (a comparative new-comer at 200 years). This is a very welcome development as the history of archaeology, which has been booming in recent years, has featured much biography and general survey, but comparatively little on major institutions.

Having said that I need to stress that Susan Pearce sees things somewhat differently. “In no sense is the volume intended to be a ‘history’ of the Society” (p. 7). Instead she sees the objective of the book as being focused on a celebration of the Society. “The papers in this volume are intended to investigate the ways in which the Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, at various moments in time, came to understand the past, and their relationship to it, and to show how these are interpreted at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (p. 6). All of this may well be perfectly true, but by the time we get to the end of the 15 substantive chapters our knowledge of the Antiquaries is significantly advanced over the Society’s previous history – Joan Evans’ *History of the Society of Antiquaries* (1956).

These substantive chapters cover a great deal of important ground, not least of which is the evolving relationship between antiquarianism and the professionalized disciplines of archaeology and history (to name just two) that came to the fore during the nineteenth century. The essays are all of a uniformly high order, but there are standout contributions on the nature of antiquarianism, the historical context of the Society, the great excavation projects sponsored, and the development of the visual and textual languages of antiquarianism.

Visions of Antiquity is a handsome production – generously illustrated and beautifully designed. Many of the contributions clearly demonstrate the value of the Society’s splendid library and its great archive. There is much new knowledge here.

Susan Pearce and her collaborators have done an excellent in bringing to light the rich and varied contributions of the Society’s Fellows to the illumination of the past. *Visions of Antiquity* is an adornment to the history of our discipline.