

BOOK REVIEW

## A Review of *Anthropology at Harvard. A Biographical History, 1790–1940*

By David L. Browman and Stephen Williams, Peabody Museum Press, 589 pages, 2013, ISBN: 9780873659130

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This massive book is eloquent testimony to the very great impact Harvard University and its Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology have had on the development of anthropology in the Americas. Of course this is anthropology in the widest sense of the term – an integration of archaeology, physical anthropology, linguistics and socio-cultural anthropology. Equally true is that this kind of anthropology was really an artefact of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, with archaeology being the pre-eminent field within anthropology at Harvard until the beginning of the twentieth century, but Browman and Williams are in search of origins, and these lie in the very late eighteenth century.

Browman and Williams have sought to manage all of this richness (and there is a superabundance of information here) by focusing on the lives and work of 500 individuals as the point of entry into a vast web of disciplinary institutions, theories, personalities and the complexities of rapidly changing social and cultural contexts. One of the most interesting outcomes of this approach is the identification of cohorts, of 'contemporaneous networks of scholars who attended the same classes and scientific meetings, worked on the same projects, and debated

issues of common interest, regardless of their subfield specialization (p. 5)'. This is Browman and Williams antidote to the 'great archaeologist' school of disciplinary history, where even the stars of the profession have been influenced by what they term the 'cohort effect'.

The resulting book is very clearly organized over twelve chapters that provide survey overviews of major periods and the influence of major influencers such as Frederick Putnam, but all of this against biographies of Harvard anthropologists and institutions. Some of these are short, while others span several pages. Of greatest interest of course are the potted histories of major benefactors and benefactions and the major movers and shakers whose stories are interwoven with the unfolding history of Harvard Anthropology and the Peabody.

This is a fascinating book. The story is compelling, the writing is fresh, complicated and reflective, and the production values are high. There is also a real sense of pride in the institution that shines through the one hundred and fifty year story of endeavour. Browman and Williams have succeeded in telling the story of Americanist anthropology anew. I am looking forward to the sequel.

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