Review
New Book Chronicle

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As recent chronicles have concentrated on sites, landscapes, specific regions or issues, artefacts have so far received little attention here. It is time to redress the balance, with the fortuitous arrival on *Antiquity*'s shelves of a series of books that have objects at their centre.

The secret life of objects

Nathan Schlanger (ed.). *Marcel Mauss: Techniques, Technology and Civilisation.* xiv+178 pages, 10 illustrations. 2006. New York & Oxford: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books; 1-57181-662-3 hardback.

Chris Caple. *Objects: Reluctant Witnesses to the Past.* xviii+266 pages, 59 illustrations, 4 tables. 2006. London & New York: Routledge; 0-415-30589-6 paperback £18.99.

J. Kateřina Dvořková (ed.). *EuroREA: (Re)construction and Experiment in Archaeology – European Platform, Volume 2 -* 2005. 160 pages, numerous b&w & colour illustrations. 2005. Eindhoven: European Exchange on Archaeological Research and Communication/Society for Experimental Archaeology Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; 80-239-5559-4 paperback €8.

Lisa Frink & Kathryn Weedman (ed.). *Gender and Hide Production*. xiv+282 pages, 30 illustrations, 8 tables. Paperback edition 2006 (first published in 2005). Lanham (MD) & Oxford: AltaMira: 0-7591-0851-X paperback £22.99.

Judith A. Habicht-Mauche, Suzanne L. Eckert & Deborah L. Huntley (ed.). *The Social Life of Pots: Glaze Wares and Cultural Dynamics in the Southwest AD 1250-1680*. xii+324 pages, 42 illustrations, 26 tables. 2006. Tucson (AZ): University of Arizona Press; 0-8165-2457-2 hardback $50.

Kenneth G. Hirth. *Obsidian Craft Production in Ancient Central Mexico*. 2006. xviii+378 pages, 171 illustrations, 124 tables. Salt Lake City (UT): University of Utah Press; 0-87480-847-2 hardback $60.

Eleanor Robson, Luke Treadwell & Chris Gosden (ed.). *Who Owns Objects?: The Ethics and Politics of Collecting Cultural Artefacts.* xvii+142 pages, 5 illustrations. 2006. Oxford: Oxbow; 1-84217-233-6 paperback £24.

Ana Filipa Vrdoljak. *International Law, Museums and the Return of Cultural Objects.* xxxvii+345 pages, 26 illustrations. 2006. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 0-521-84142-9 hardback £55 & $99.

Let us start with a dose of theory, with Marcel Mauss' writings on *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*. Collected by Nathan Schlanger who contributes an illuminating introductory essay, as well as, with others, translations of Mauss's ideas, this book is an excellent start to a new series, the 'Histories of Archaeology', published by Berghahn Books. As many of us are guilty of spouting ideas second- or third-hand, the series promises to be a valuable resource and a salutary reminder to go back to the roots. Who has not read references to *habitus* and seen it ascribed to Bourdieu alone? Well, Mauss, Durkheim's nephew and pupil (biography on p. 160), wrote mainly in the 1920s and 1930s, and his best-known text, 'Techniques of the Body' came out in 1935 when Bourdieu was five years old. We encounter the *habitus* on p. 80, after considerations on running and walking: 'Hence I have had this notion of the social nature of the *habitus* for many years. The word translates infinitely better than 'habitude' (habits or custom) . . . These habits . . . vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestige. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties'. But Schlanger notes (p. 19) that this is 'a philosophical concept *revived* by Mauss' (my emphasis) 'and subsequently developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu'. There is much else besides in this collection: Mauss' views on Bergson, the rescuing of technique and technology from Durkheim, or the notion of '*l'homme total*'. By putting Mauss' texts, some not much more than loose lecture notes of, it has to be said, uneven quality, between two hard covers, and providing context, including a set of contemporary photographs

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00094795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Native Australians from the Cambridge Haddon collection, Schlanger has done us a good turn.

So, objects, the result of techniques and vice versa, are imbued with social meaning. Some would say they have a social life. *Objects*, Chris Caple's contribution and the most wide-ranging of the octet, bridges neatly the gap between theoretical thinking and technology. This comprehensive introduction teaches us to read objects, these *Reluctant Witnesses to the Past*, using a combination of explanation, presentation of scientific investigative techniques and case studies. Precise, well-organised, using bullet points, Caple's manual answers in six chapters the questions we can ask of objects (who, how, where, why, when?). It is full of detail and extremely useful; not only does it explain in simple terms how techniques such as ICPS (induction-coupled plasma spectrometry) work, but it then follows through with richly documented case histories, such as an Anglo-Saxon pendant from Milton Keynes, the Coppergate helmet, the Bayeux tapestry, the Winchester reliquary, the Durham cathedral doors or a fake Chinese Han dynasty mirror in the Burrell Collection in Glasgow, amongst others. One regret is that most examples are British and medieval, and that relatively few come from good or complex archaeological contexts. Nevertheless, the procedures have wide applications. I would certainly recommend this book; not only to students but to anyone interested in how rich object biographies are constructed.

Reconstruction could be the next step. This is what the Society for Experimental Archaeology Hradec Králové (Czech Republic) and EXARC, the European network of Open Air Museums, are engaged in. Their journal, *EuroREA: (Re)construction and Experiment in Archaeology – European Platform* reports, in its second volume, on a number of experiments, including the fulling of cloth in The Netherlands or producing Neolithic winged beads in Switzerland. This is a truly European forum: volume 2 has contributions from the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Denmark, The Netherlands, Germany Switzerland, France and the United Kingdom. Though still a bit 'folksy' – there are plenty of pictures of people in loose scratchy clothes, and the odd (extremely long) loin cloth (on p. 73) – the journal contains a number of reflexive papers on the direction of experimental archaeology and its, sometimes awkward, relationship with presentation and reconstruction. Further, advice on conducting experiments rigorously and on publishing their results show that *EuroREA* wants to be taken seriously. We look forward to more insights into material culture from this new journal.

How is this material culture analysed, interpreted, reported? Three studies of materials, all from the Americas, feature here as examples of different styles.

Gender and Hide Production is an edited collection that first appeared in 2005. It aims to rescue women from the 'Drudge on the Hide' and does so with a vengeance. Kevin P. Gilmore sets the tone in Chapter 2: 'This chapter has a protagonist. She possessed a number of skills and was highly proficient in the tasks that she performed. These tasks were of great importance to the people who relied on her, and the tasks had great meaning to her, ensuring her and her family the respect of everyone in her band. We do not know her name, but we do know that she lived sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century AD. . . . And we know that she made a moccasin to replace the one she left behind at Franktown Cave' (p. 13). Pass the sick bag, and allow me a short rant. The book's argument goes something like this: a solid body of ethnographic observations and historic records show that amongst the Plains Indians it was the task of the women to prepare hides, hence the 'Drudge on the Hide', projected back into prehistory: it is 'the quintessential work of women in many kinds of depiction of prehistoric life' (p. xv). A number of things apparently follow: it is highly likely that tools used in hide production were also made by women (p. 23: 'the predominance of local toolstones suggests that these scrapers were made by women'; what sort of evidence is that?). Further, as hides were essential to the economy of the group, to trade and to prestige, women played a crucial role; they were not downtrodden creatures engaged in 'unimportant, repetitive, unskilled domestic tasks' (p. 198). The contributors then set out to counter this image with case studies from Plains communities, both prehistoric and ethnographic, and from Canada, Alaska, South Africa and Ethiopia. But who is arguing? Why portray prehistoric women as a bunch of Stepford wives, why set up Aunt Sallys only to shoot them down in a hail of feminist friendly fire? Indeed 'it is all too easy for twenty-first century well-educated middle class persons of European descent to view Plains Indian marriage . . . as oppressive to women' (p. 87). So, stop wasting time in pointless protestations. Rant aside, there is a serious point to be made: engendering archaeology must not be an exercise in wishful thinking, it must not be

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allowed to turn into a circular argument: 'What we want to avoid is correlating an assumed relationship between gender and a particular tool type with the presence or absence of people of that gender at an archaeological site' (Laura L. Scheiber, p. 60, in a balanced contribution on bison hides). Gender attributions cannot be based, especially if you are 'acutely aware of the limitations' (Judith A. Habicht-Mauche, p. 54), on 'unsystematic surface collections' (*eadem,* p. 44). Precisely because the ethnohistoric record is copious, it must be interrogated to identify the signature of women's activities in the archaeological record. But that is extremely hard to do, though in rare cases it might be possible; an example from Alaska shows musculoskeletal markers on sexed skeletons, indicating that Golovin Bay women chewed skins to soften hides (Susan L. Steen, p. 124-30). It would be unfair to end this review without giving the contributors to *Gender and Hide Production* some credit for awareness of the problem: in her summing up Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood concedes euphemistically that 'interpretations are underdetermined by data' (p. 210). That is the problem.

We return to *habitus* in *The Social Life of Pots*, the proceedings of a symposium of the Society for American Archaeology in Denver, Colorado, in 2002, convened 'to examine not only how specific technologies are structured by, but also structure, their specific cultural and social milieu' (p. 11). The subject matter is the painted and glazed pottery of late Pueblo communities, a class of artefact that has benefited from much new analysis, including petrographic analysis, EPMS (electron probe microanalysis) or ICPS, as well as from more traditional studies of fabric, form and style, since Kidder and Shepard realised in the 1930s that much of the ceramic of Pueblo settlements was not home-made, implying extensive networks of exchange (summary by Cordell, p. 257 ff.). The volume under review has its longueurs: 'while glaze ware pots tended to circulate within networks of interaction that tended to reinforce local community and ethnolinguistic identities, specialized raw materials such as lead ore moved through systems of interaction that linked individuals and communities on a larger regional and interregional scale' (Nelson & Habicht-Mauche, p. 201) seems a tortuous way to say that people needed to go further afield to procure appropriate materials. Altogether, this book is a thorough appraisal, more deeply rooted in data than *Gender and Hides*. An interesting paper (chapter 6, by Huntley) caught my eye: it analyses the brushstroke sequence on painted pots, as decoration betrays 'graphic behaviour'. This work leads to the concept of 'communities of practice', a concept taken up by many other contributors, and the hallmark of the book.

Obsidian Craft Production in Ancient Central Mexico is a detailed report by a single author, KENNETH G. HIRTH. It deals with the obsidian prismatic blade industry, the whole *chaîne opératoire*, that was practiced at Xochicalco in central Mexico in the Epiclassic period (AD 650-900), after the decline of Teotihuacan, at a time of emerging city-states. This well-structured study takes us, in 13 chapters, from the site itself to the wider economy of prehistoric Mesoamerica. It concentrates on the data from five excavated workshop areas, four in domestic quarters and one in an open public plaza. The examination of cores, core rejuvenation flakes, blades and other artefacts (chapters 2-4) is followed by an assessment of the sources of obsidian, its procurement and organisation (chapter 5), the spatial analysis of the four domestic workshops and plaza context (chapters 6-7) and a quantification of their output (chapter 8). We then move on to use-wear analysis, to the function of tools, weapons and large bifaces, and the degree of specialisation in production (chapters 9-11), before being presented with a local model and its place in the economy of central Mexico (chapters 12-13). Every aspect of production appears meticulously and cogently argued, and the conclusions are far-reaching: the cores arrived on site with blades already removed, but there was no shortage in supply; large bifaces and other lithic artefacts were obtained differently, with Xochicalco craftsmen acting as intermediaries (p. 113); the sources of obsidian were located 150-200km away and the material came via itinerant craftsmen (p. 134-5); production was at household level, perhaps occupying 3-5 people per household, intermittently; in the plaza workshop, specialist market sellers were established, possibly 8-9 craftsmen (p. 201); the domestic output of blades is estimated at 500-1000 (p. 216), many intended for exchange in a market place economy (p. 240); the elite acquired its special artefacts through tribute or on the market (p. 257); all aspects of obsidian production were carried out by the same individual craftsman, probably not full time (p. 273) and not organised into guilds; and finally the monopoly of Teotihuacan is challenged, in a model that involves domestic modes of production (p. 289 ff.). Though highly impressive

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this report leaves a nagging question: can we really say that much, in that much detail? More generally, and this is not a criticism of Xochicalco: how can we be certain that our excavations, stratigraphy, recovery levels, sampling template and statistical methods are up to scratch?

We end with a couple of volumes that trace the fate of objects, once in the public and private domain, sometimes leading a secret life. That life does not necessarily end in a museum.

The outcome of a seminar series and workshop held in Oxford in 2004, Robson, Treadwell & Gosden's edited book investigates *Who Owns Objects?* This initiative brings together different perspectives: from archaeologists, collectors, traders, museum curators, and those who try to make the legislation work. Though this is a simplification, the different camps remain largely entrenched, either side of a line that divides those who see objects primarily as elements of a wider context – mostly archaeologists, sometimes accused of hating objects (Boardman, p. 38) – from those who value objects for their intrinsic, artistic merit, the collectors, the dealers, at times the museums. Thus, Neil Brodie (representing the Renfrew 'camp') offers a pessimistic assessment of the world of traded antiquities, while Ortiz and Boardman take a dim view of archaeologists, urging them, with some justification, to put their own house in order. In between these positions are recounted the experiences of dealers (Kampmann, Ede, commented on by Mayhew), and museum curators (Roberts, Gaimster, O'Neill, the latter offering a fascinating account of the return of a Native American Ghost Dance shirt, captured at Wounded Knee in 1890, kept in Glasgow Museum for a century, and given back to the Lakota people in 1999). There are glimpses of progress, like the creation of Culture Banks in Mali which allows local people to use cultural items to secure loans from the World Bank (p. xv) or the British Portable Antiquities scheme, and valiant efforts are made by museums and reputable traders to exercise 'due diligence' by formulating clear protocols. But 'there is no easy answer', the editors warn.

International Law, Museums and the Return of Cultural Objects is impressive. Thoroughly referenced, with tables of cases and instruments (the law) and a chronological chart of treaties, containing a forest of footnotes and a veritable smörgåsbord of acronyms, this book is nevertheless written with exemplary clarity, keeping the reader's attention. The book is structured in three parts that follow a sequence from 1815 to the present and which focus on Britain in the nineteenth century, the USA in the twentieth century and Australia in recent times; in each case a museum – the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Australian Museum in Sydney – is used to illustrate evolving trends. The subject is also treated under three headings which examine three principles: the 'sacred' link between peoples, places and their material culture; the desire to redeem past wrongs; and the part restitution plays in the affirmation of identity. This structure hides a wealth of information and gives time-depth to an argument that some might think quite recent: the post-Napoleonic Congress of Vienna (1815) was already debating the rights and wrongs of restitution. I particularly liked the judicious use of quotes, my favourite being 'I do not know anything about national feeling; I am a keeper of British antiquities' (C.H. Read, 1899, quoted on p. 73, in a case involving Irish ornaments in the British Museum, discussed on p. 88-92). Of course, the book has an agenda, the promotion of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, but it is put forward soberly and convincingly. Indigenous people have in Ana Filipa Vrdoljak a strong advocate and her book deserves a wide Western readership.

This foray into the recent literature of objects testifies to a lively scene: objects are social constructs, 'reluctant witnesses' that can nevertheless be coaxed or bludgeoned into disclosing their economic role, their social life, their gender. Analysed, reconstructed, acquired, traded, loved, protected, these objects speak volumes.

Pictland

We end this chronicle with short notices of four books on Pictland: two deal with the remarkable art of the Picts and two are about what might have been or may yet be discovered.

George Henderson & Isabel Henderson. *The Art of the Picts: Sculpture and Metalwork in Early Medieval Scotland*. 256 pages, 332 figures. 2004. London: Thames & Hudson; 0-500-23807-3 hardback.

Sally M. Foster & Morag Cross (ed.). *Able Minds and Practised Hands: Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the 21st Century* (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 23). xii+436 pages, 155 illustrations. 2005. London: Society for Medieval Archaeology; 1-904350-74-7 hardback £44.

Nick Aitchison. *Forteviot: a Pictish and Scottish Royal Centre*. 288 pages, 89 illustrations, 27

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