
BOOKS NOTED



We start with a book that was meant to be the subject of a full review that was commissioned but never delivered. It is unclear why reviewers take on books when it seems they have no intention of providing the review. *Africa and Archaeology. Empowering an Expatriate Life* (2009; London: The Radcliffe Press; ISBN 978-1-84511-994-2) is the autobiography of one of the most distinguished Africanist archaeologists alive today, Merrick Posnansky. It provides a fascinating account of Prof. Posnansky's career, but is much more than this being also a personal memoir thus giving us a privileged insight into the Posnansky family, home life, and the challenges they faced. The value of the book is at multiple levels, obviously in relation to the individual narrative and life story but also as a document that gives a sense of what it was like to be an archaeologist in Africa on the cusp of independence when archaeologists were few, as well as in subsequent decades. Detail is provided on Prof. Posnansky's excavations at sites such as Hani in Ghana, which adds anecdotes, people, and nuance to the usually drier academic studies that our discipline demands, and which can be read alongside the autobiographical account. Overall, this book is testimony to the many and varied accomplishments of Merrick Posnansky and it is hoped that he continues his endeavours for many years to come.

Notice of the second book to be considered has been delayed for various reasons. This is the catalogue edited by Floriane Morin and Boris Wastiau *African Terra Cottas. A Millenary Heritage in the Barbier-Mueller Museum Collections* (2008; Geneva: Barbier-Mueller Museum; ISBN 978-2-7572-0231-9). This volume and the exhibition that it accompanied have proven to be very controversial and have been critiqued by, among others, Eric Huysecom at the University of Geneva. These criticisms are well founded in that many of the terracotta figurines and some of the ceramic vessels illustrated and described are from pillaged sites and thus lack adequate provenance and context. This

is a great shame as an attempt has been made here to bring together discussion, including by well-respected scholars such as Suzanne Preston-Blier and Francis Van Noten, of a wide range of interesting material not often connected together under one cover. The book is divided into various sections with a foreword followed by three introductions, eight chapters on West Africa, six on Nigeria (also in West Africa so why it was treated separately is unclear), one on Cameroon, six on Central Africa, and one each on East and South Africa respectively. Overall this is a very problematic book with, for instance, the discussion of the "Nok, Sokoto and Katsina archaeological cultures" by Claire Boullier seemingly wholly based on looters pieces! Similarly, the figurative terracotta's from the Inland Niger Delta area of Mali described by Kristina Van Dyke also lack provenance. Unfortunately, the publication and display of looted artifacts is inexcusable so this volume is rendered of little worth or scholarly utility.

Another new book that has appeared is Paul Pettitt's *The Palaeolithic Origins of Human Burial* (2011; Abingdon: Routledge; ISBN 978-0-415-35490-5). This provides an interesting consideration of some material directly pertinent to interpreting African prehistory in providing, according to the author, "the first comprehensive survey of Palaeolithic mortuary activity in the English language" (frontispiece). Africa is central to exploring the origins of human burial and the symbolic aspects of mortuary ritual. This discussion begins with chimpanzees, African obviously, framed within a fascinating consideration of the "primate roots for early hominid morbidity and mortuary activity" (p. 11). Beyond primates, attention is also paid to African palaeoanthropological material including *Australopithecus anamensis* and *africanus* and *Paranthropus boisei* within, for example, examining "cronos compulsions" — "the physical extension of morbidity to the extent of consuming parts of hominin carcasses" (p. 45). Early *Homo sapiens* are also considered, but in less detail. This book is to be recom-

mended and the focus is certainly on interpretation and theory building and as such compliments well Barham and Mitchell's, *The First Africans* (2008; Cambridge University Press) excellent and more detailed review of the primary African empirical material that Pettitt draws upon.

Less exciting, for an opportunity has been missed in including more non-European case studies is the volume edited by Simon J. Knell along with eight other editors, *National Museums. New Studies from Around the World* (2011; Abingdon: Routledge; ISBN 978-0-415-54771-1). This book, part of a seeming tide of museological texts examining the concept of the museum in all its variant forms, seeks to "offer an extraordinarily rich insight into the place of national museums in society" (p. xix). Here both the reference to "World" in the title and "society" just cited should primarily be understood as European (though even this is obviously not singular). There is material from elsewhere; Turkey, Korea, China and Colombia for example, but Africa is neglected. The sole study focused on the continent is an, albeit interesting, examination of how the Congo was exhibited in Stockholm, Sweden, at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of Swedish missionary activity in Central Africa. The rationale of the book is described as focusing upon Museums that are rarely explored in English-language museology, but even accepting this premise there are various examples of African National Museums that would have made rewarding case studies to include.

Paul Bahn has also given us a new book on rock art *Prehistoric Rock Art. Polemics and Progress* (2010; New York: Cambridge University Press; ISBN 978-0-521-14087-4). This is described as a successor to his earlier (1998) *Cambridge Illustrated History of Prehistoric Art*. It derives from the Rhind lectures he delivered at the University of Edinburgh and ranges across various subjects relating to the interpretation, location, and preservation of rock art in global contexts. Paul Bahn writes very well and it is an interesting read though the 'witty' chapter headings do grate, "The votive motive" and "Mustn't crumble" for example. Polemics are certainly not avoided and two of seven chapters are dedicated to dismantling the shamanic/entoptic phenomena/ASC model that was of course originally based on San material from southern Africa as developed by David Lewis-Williams. Bahn is not a fan of these interpretations and this is spelt out. Summaries of other recent research and debates in Africa are also provided as with Lenssen-Erz's interpretations of rock art in the Namibian Brandberg (pp. 44–45), and the controversy surrounding the recording of the Dabous giraffes in Niger by the Trust for African Rock Art (Tara) (p. 186). All considered it is a useful book.

A new contribution to the proliferating interest in 'material culture' studies is provided by *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* edited by Dan Hicks and Mary Beaudry (2010; Oxford: Oxford University Press; ISBN 978-0-19-921871-4). At 28 chapters and 774 pages this is a physically big book. Inevitably it invites comparisons and at the outset it has to be stated that it is not as useful as the first of these handbooks to appear, the *Handbook of Material Culture* edited by Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands and Spyer and published by Sage in 2006. The contributions lack the same sort of weight as those in the latter and vary significantly in their quality. However, there are some useful chapters and these include Dietler on 'Consumption', Joyce and Pollard on 'Archaeological Assemblages and Practices of Deposition', and Knappett, Malafouris and Tomkins on 'Ceramics (as Containers)'. There are also two useful chapters provided by authors whose names will be familiar to Africanist readers — Anne Brower Stahl writing about 'Material Histories' and Zoë Crossland on 'Materiality and Embodiment'. There are occasional examples drawn from African archaeology, primate studies, and ethnography included, with probably Stahl making the most use of African material in presenting a section on 'Material Histories of West African Global Entanglements'.

A counterpoint to the last book is provided by one of the chapters in the anthropologist Tim Ingold's new volume of collected papers, *Being Alive. Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011; Abingdon: Routledge; ISBN 978-0-415-57684-0). This follows on from his successful and influential volume *The Perception of the Environment* (2000) and ranges across a variety of subjects — place, animals, the weather, perceiving the world. The chapter (2) in question is "Materials against Materiality" which argues that in the ever-burgeoning literature on 'materiality' very little is actually ever said about materials by either archaeologists or anthropologists. This might not be entirely correct, but does make us think about the need to connect both theory and empirical content. This is a thought-provoking book, primarily theoretical, but which should be of interest to anyone involved in interpreting the archaeological record and past 'worlds'.

The next book is perhaps more of relevance to Africanist rather than African archaeologists and this is *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation* edited by Nicholas Márquez-Grant and Linda Fibiger (2011; Abingdon: Routledge; ISBN 978-0-415-58857-7). This point is made not to be exclusive but because the content, even though subtitled 'an International Guide' contains only three en-