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Howard Williams and Melanie Giles, eds. *Archaeologists and the Dead: Mortuary Archaeology in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, xx and 465pp., 78 b/w illustr., 5 tables., hbk, ISBN: 978-0-19-875353-7)

Human remains are immensely powerful; they can offer tangible, often personal, connections to the past, helping to forge links with the present in ways that certain other archaeological remains cannot. Last year whilst I was running an osteology workshop for the public, one young boy who until this point had been silently contemplating the skeleton before him, proudly exclaimed to the encircling crowd ‘he’s got teeth like my dad!’ Following a moment of collective embarrassment and awkward amusement, his father, seemingly unfazed, agreed; what followed was a lively—and rather informative—debate on dental hygiene in the past, and today. The dead, in their many forms, provoke a range of emotions and attitudes, promote contemplation and reflection, and stimulate dialogue and debate; they have a potent agency. However, with this come complex challenges, as well as varied responsibilities for many different actors.

This edited volume provides a timely and thought-provoking exploration of these complexities in mortuary archaeology. Traditionally, mortuary contexts were mostly of interest for the objects they contained; the body itself often dismissed as inconvenient. However, more recent works (e.g. Gowland & Knüsel, 2006; Sofaer, 2006; Tarlow & Nilsson Stutz, 2013) have challenged this to consider the many complex dimensions of the archaeological body—and mortuary archaeology—in terms of what they can tell us about the past, but also their role in contemporary society. This volume makes an important

contribution to this burgeoning area of study and demonstrates through its diverse contributions its growing interdisciplinarity.

Developed from two conference sessions co-organised by the editors in 2010 (held at the IfA (Institute for Archaeologists, now the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists) and TAG (Theoretical Archaeology Group) annual conferences in Southport and Bristol respectively), this volume integrates a diverse range of experiences and perspectives from those working in, among others, museums, commercial and research archaeology, heritage organisations, and universities. Eighteen papers detail, and reflect upon, a wide spectrum of processes, practices, and current debates in mortuary archaeology. They explore how we excavate, study, present, and interpret the ancient and more recent dead—both tangible and intangible. This volume is also about relationships between professionals, professionals and the public, and various audiences and stakeholders, and considers how we can navigate these. Overall the contributions are reflective, provocative, and often personal. They question key aspects of our practice, and issues we are confronted with: how do we manage competing claims on bodies? At what stage do we engage the various stakeholders, and to what extent? What is the relevance of what we do, and how can we effectively evaluate, and communicate this?

The contributions are predominantly UK-focussed, but also include others from northern, western, and central Europe and North America; further international case studies are drawn upon for comparison. The volume is organised into three sections, contextualised by Mike Parker Pearson's foreword, and the editors' preface and introduction. Here, key themes in contemporary mortuary archaeology are discussed, situated within the context of changing frameworks, legislation, and the recent 'crisis' in burial archaeology. For readers unfamiliar

with recent UK developments, this provides important background to many of the contributions. Goldstein's concluding reflections (Ch. 20) offer a thoughtful overview of the themes and discussions, also considering some of these predominately UK/European-based case studies within the context of her own experiences working in the US. This offers another dimension, demonstrating further the variability in approaches, whilst again emphasizing how much we have still to understand about the different traditions.

Section 1 'Investigating the Dead' includes six papers that reflect upon processes of excavating mortuary sites and recovering human remains. Together they exemplify the diversity of contexts in which archaeologists work. Four of these (Chs 2, 3, 5, and 6) explore the excavation of more recent cemeteries, and burials, dating mainly from the early-nineteenth to the late-twentieth century. Anthony (Ch. 2) discusses excavations of a modern cemetery in Copenhagen. Here, the complex practicalities and sensitivities surrounding excavating recent bodies in varying preservational states were amplified by the local community's affinity with the place. Their decision to limit public observation and to maintain a low profile forms a fascinating contrast to Pearson and Jeffs' (Ch. 5) work at the liberated African graveyard cemetery on St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean. Here, initial reactions from the island's inhabitants to archaeological work were muted, partly due to a lack of connection to the interred population and burial place. Whilst Anthony offers useful reflections on the issues—including some lost opportunities—arising from *not* actively engaging the public during the project, Pearson and Jeffs discuss the challenges—but eventual benefits—they faced striving to.

Whereas in St Helena, the archaeologists unexpectedly became those with the closest affiliation to the buried population, the experience at Fromelles, France, discussed by Brown in Chapter 6, was the opposite. Brown's paper is particularly noteworthy in its discussion of how multiple contesting claims of ownership over the WWI fallen soldiers emerged, including from the Army, individual soldiers, archaeologists, landowners, and families. He importantly asks 'to whom does the body belong?' (p. 114). How to navigate these intricate social, political, legal, ethical, and of course emotional contexts and relationships or 'intersections' (p. 450) is a fundamental consideration underlying this volume. Importantly, the difficult issue of experience and training (or sometimes lack thereof) for those confronting challenging mortuary contexts, and complex situational dynamics, is explicitly raised (e.g. Chs 5, 6, 20). This volume complements other recent works (e.g. Crossland & Joyce, 2015) in highlighting the multi-layered skills and roles that those working with the dead must possess or fulfil. McClelland and Cerezo-Román's (Ch. 3) discussion on the excavation and reburial at the Alameda-Stone cemetery, Tucson, Arizona, also conveys this, but from a very different angle. They argue that during excavation, analysis, and reburial, the body is transformed, and osteologists are involved in constructing new identities through 're-embodiment'. Osteologists are in turn 'transformed from collectors and custodians of the dead to interpreters and facilitators in the process of forming new identities' (p.61); with this clearly comes considerable responsibilities, but also opportunities, they convey, to build relationships between the communities of the living and the dead. Overall, the 'conversations' throughout this volume are valuable in opening up dialogue surrounding our roles, and how we confront sensitive situations; this is an area where a growing discussion across disciplines would be invaluable going forward.

Qualitative and quantitative survey methods are increasingly being employed to evaluate attitudes to human remains and mortuary archaeology amongst professionals (Rajala, Ch. 4), and the wider public. What is apparent from many of the papers is that the British public *do* want to engage in various ways with the archaeological dead; restrictions are more often imposed at government level or from within the profession itself (Chs 7, 11, 12). Sayer and Sayer (Ch. 7) in their survey of public attitudes to their excavations at Oakington, Cambridgeshire, make a convincing case for more open engagement with the public. As Pearson and Jeffs (Ch.5) also found, this can create a platform for dialogue, which in turn can build trust, respect, and positive social relationships amongst different groups and audiences.

Section 2 ‘Displaying the Dead’ explores different types—and roles—of human remains in museum contexts. Swain’s opening chapter (Ch. 8) is helpful in framing subsequent discussions. He considers the treatment of remains in museums from across the globe to highlight the diversity in approaches that are related, he argues, to ‘overlapping and divergent religious, ethical, political, cultural, historic, scientific, and social factors’ (p. 172). Nilsson Stutz (Ch. 13) exemplifies this variability further through considering the ways in which human remains are exhibited in the US compared with Scandinavia. These contributions form an important bridge with Section 1 in highlighting how, as with mortuary archaeology in the field, no two contexts are the same. Chapters 9, 11, and 12 consider decision-making processes within institutions surrounding exhibitions and interpretive projects involving human remains. The ‘covering the mummies’ (2008) incident and the ‘Lindow Man: A Bog Body Mystery’ exhibition (2008–2009) will undoubtedly be familiar to many readers, but Exell (Ch.11) and Jenkins (Ch. 12) offer important new insights into the internal institutional dynamics, and external influences, affecting their creation and handling. The involvement of the Pagan organisation ‘Honouring the Ancient Dead’ (HAD) is considered; for which further

context is provided by Rathouse (Ch. 15), and from the perspective of Austrian attitudes to reburial (Weiss-Krejci, Ch. 16). Jenkins concludes that moves towards greater inclusivity on the part of the museums, together with the unstable nature of their role and responsibilities opens the door to questionable claims from particular, more vocal, groups. This is an important point, as it is easy to see how in such circumstances bodies—with the power they hold—can be appropriated for various personal and political agendas.

Chapters 10 (Nordström) and 14 (Williams) form an interesting contrast to one another in discussing the display and foregrounding of famous prehistoric ‘immortal’ bodies in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (Nordström, Ch. 10)—and the attention these receive in current debates and research—compared with ‘systematically overlooked’ (p. 323) displays of cremated remains. Williams (Ch. 14) argues that individuality is never completely lost with the cremated dead—there are varied stories to tell, whereby effective display that also addresses the process of cremation itself could promote a better understanding, and greater appreciation surrounding mortuary practices in the past. This seems to relate to Tatham’s (Ch.9, p. 202) point about the public’s appetite for fresh subjects and desire to be challenged possibly being denied by cautious display strategies. Many of the volume’s papers demonstrate that in a European context, there is clearly an expectation on the part of the public to see human remains in museums. However, by always ‘showcasing’ particular types of bodies, we fuel certain expectations, and deny people the challenge of confronting wide-ranging variability in the archaeological record, and the full complexity of past and contemporary mortuary practices.

The final section ‘Public Mortuary Archaeology’ sets out to explore interactions between society, media, and mortuary archaeology. Here, the papers touch on many themes presented thus far, such as Weiss-Krejci (Ch. 16) in her thought-provoking, and at times poignant—even surprising—consideration of cemeteries and reburial in Austria, where she reinforces earlier discussions on variability in contemporary attitudes to the dead. Sayer and Walter (Ch. 17) offer a particularly interesting paper evaluating online responses to three British burial archaeology events. They demonstrate—as to be expected—that there is no ‘public opinion’ concerning the management of human remains (in the same way that there is no ‘neo-Pagan opinion’, see Rathouse, Ch. 15); it is context-dependent, and as such they advocate an early, pro-active engagement with the public to help frame the stories covered by the media. The mass media plays an important and influential role in how stories are told (Nordström, p. 205). Its involvement can be greatly unpredictable—a key challenge facing a sensitive area such as mortuary archaeology. Finally, Kirk and Giles both discuss how we can explore death in the past through imaginative, poetic (Ch. 18), and visual (Ch. 19), approaches and representations. For Giles, creative engagement with the past in such ways, particularly through close collaboration between archaeologist and illustrator, can produce visualisations that prompt and provoke audience responses and critique, whilst also helping to ‘challenge societal stereotypes’ (p. 424). That project budgets, Giles notes, rarely extend to such purposes is a difficult issue, and I cannot help but sympathise with Goldstein’s (p. 448–49) cautionary point that questions how far we can realistically go with certain practices considering the increasing financial and time pressures, complex political terrains, and a lack of longevity in professional positions.

This volume offers much for reflection, and should be read by professionals and students researching, and working, in all areas of mortuary archaeology. It is a shame, however, that



there are a number of typographical mistakes, and for a subject matter as visually engaging as this, the images—which were at times too small or low resolution in print—could have done more to complement and reinforce the narratives. Overall, however, I particularly appreciated that the volume was not framed in terms of ‘this is how things should be done’, but also openly appraised situations where what was done did not necessarily go as expected or could have been approached differently. A key message I came away with was that we can develop and follow standards, guidelines, frameworks, and policies for best practice, but a degree of flexibility and adaptability in our approaches (e.g. Chs 2, 5, 7) are also imperative; no two contexts are the same, and effectively predicting responses from individuals and communities is not always possible. Related to this point, I could not help thinking that the issue of training (as raised in several chapters) for those working in socially, politically, and emotionally sensitive environments needed foregrounding more as a fundamental concern from the outset of the volume. As with the ‘general public’, we talk of ‘archaeologists’ as a collective, but the dead have the power to impact us all in individual and unexpected ways (e.g. Ch. 6). This volume is a positive reflection on the important work that those in mortuary archaeology do. However, if we are to ‘develop and expand the role of archaeologists as mediators as well as investigators’ (p. 12), whilst also shouldering expectations of being facilitators, educators, evaluators, and effective communicators—including in challenging contexts—more direct discussion on how best to equip us with the necessary skills is clearly needed moving forward.

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