



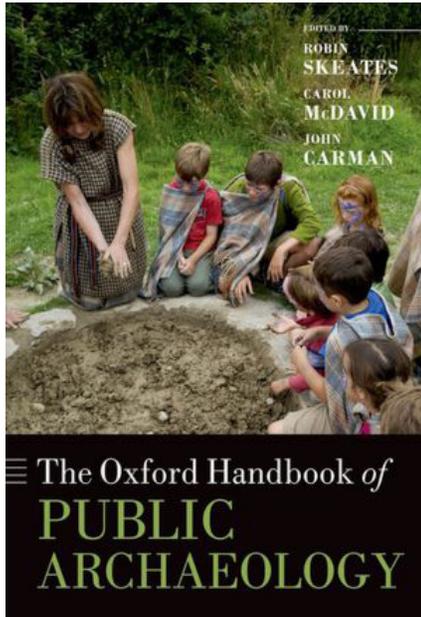
Editor:
Jaime Almansa Sánchez



www.arqueologiapublica.es

Online Journal in Public Archaeology

REVIEWS



Jaime ALMANSA SÁNCHEZ
JAS Arqueología S.L.U.

**The Oxford Handbook of
Public Archaeology**
[Ed. by Robin Skeates, Carol McDavid
and John Carman]

Oxford University Press
ISBN: 978-0-19-923782-1
751 pages

I could not believe how fast Oxford University Press sent me a copy of the book. So fast, that this review is one of the causes of the delay in this volume's publication. I needed to include it; seven hundred pages of Public Archaeology deserved it.

My first impression when I opened the parcel was, "wow, huge!" The second, "I thought a handbook was something else..." as my expectations crumbled a bit when I looked at the contents. But I could not have any negative feelings in front of such an impressive compilation of papers, so I ended up thinking, "Great! Anyway this is a step forward."

In the following lines, I will try to provide a constructive critique of the book and an overview of its main papers, within the context of current publications in the field.

What is Public Archaeology? This is one of the questions we need to ask ourselves before saying anything else. The first forum in this volume of AP Journal serves as an example of the uncertainty about a

term we have been using for forty years, not really knowing what we meant. When I started this journal, I tried to give a short and concise definition to be used (Almansa 2010) and in this line, we also have Gabriel Moshenka's proposal, as an answer to our question, "What makes #pubarch important?" (see this volume's Editorial). If I had to reach a conclusion only from the scope of the journal, it would be that public archaeology is not only...

So I must say that public archaeology is not only what this book offers, and that is why I am reluctant to call it a "handbook". The introduction explains the content better than the cover and I should note that I mostly agree with it. By this I mean that with a different title this review would have been even better. One of my first contacts with public archaeology was a basic book in the field (Merriman 2004). What is the difference between Merriman's book and this one, besides the date and the number of pages? It worries me that we seem to be in the same stage of a new-born discipline eight years later.

Delving into the book, a new question arises. The editors say that "[m]any (but by no means all) of the contributors are Anglo-American in nationality or residence, reflecting the dominance of Anglophone discourse in this field" (2). I do not like this, even when I participate in the Anglophone neo-colonialism of science. The fact that we need to write and speak in English to understand each other does not mean Anglo-Americans dominate this field. A good explanation is actually given by Kristiansen (Chapter 23: 461-477), or the response I should give to Darville (Chapter 19: 373-394) when he calls the APAG the only of the nearly 20 active professional associations of archaeologists in Spain (386). The fact that we do not have the chance to read other experiences (because we do not know the language, or they are not even published) does not mean the mainstream dominates. At this point, I would like to give two examples from Japan: The first one is another book reviewed in this volume (Okamura and Matsuda 2011) that includes the approaches from more than 10 different countries, mostly peripheral. The second one is a movie I love since I had the fortune to watch it, *Tsukinawa Kofun* (Kondo 1960, 1998), which shows an amazing community-participated dig that took place in 1952.

In many countries, the practice of public archaeology has been practiced for decades, but there was no label for it (or they used a different one). Since Charles McGimsey (1972) put the label, the name started to spread in the Anglo-American context and, step by step, in its area of influence, but the definition is not totally set yet. This is

why we are still corseted in partial views that already have/had a label and, although they are under the umbrella of public archaeology, they cannot be the (only) centre of the discourse anymore.

One important problem of the book I should highlight is the missing chapters, in terms of content and representation. But pulling the thread from the book, and being aware of the reasons given in the introduction, we can bear in mind Praetzelis' conclusion "one should act locally while thinking globally" (Chapter 16: 330). Forgiven.

Having said that, I prefer to focus on my 'Top 3' chapters, starting from McGhee's "Participatory Action Research and Archaeology" (Chapter 11: 213-229), a great example of what a handbook should contain; complete, didactic and useful. Nowadays, we have dozens of examples of community archaeology projects in the bibliography, but PAR is a step forward in terms of community participation with a greater goal; social change (remember McGuire 2008 and Stottman 2010). For me, this is one of the key issues in contemporary practice of public archaeology; not just sharing but also being useful. In this context, I would like to read between the lines of Chakrabarti's "Archaeology and Politics in the Third World, with special reference to India" (Chapter 6: 116-132). It is also a bright spot in the book. I have to admit that my personal point of view on this topic is slightly different, probably more radical owing to my experience in Ethiopia (Almansa *et al* 2011), but Chakrabarti highlights some essential issues in the practice of archaeology from the perspective of public archaeology; the way we (First World) work there (Third World) but not with them (local professionals and publics), or the added difficulties of doing public archaeology where we can hardly do even archaeology. Finally, Murray's "Writing histories of archaeology" (Chapter 7: 135-152) raises another essential issue that should concern public archaeology; Historiography. The impact of what we write for the diverse publics that can/may consume it, as well as for the development of archaeology. In this sense, not only a critical approach to already written material, but also a focus on archaeology as a discipline that deserves to be written about, are essential.

Besides these three chapters, I should also highlight Thomas' (Chapter 3: 60-81) on metal detecting in Britain, complemented by Brodie's (Chapter 12: 230-252) and Kersel's (Chapter 13: 253-272) on antiquities trade. This reminds me to promote the next book from JAS Arqueología (Rodríguez Temiño 2012), which is about the protection of archaeological heritage in Spain. Other chapters that are worth mentioning: Skeates' (Chapter 4: 82-99) walk through the History of

Maltese archaeology to show how it is represented; Pace's (Chapter 14: 275-298) on the value and sustainability of heritage; Schofield, Kiddey and Lashua's (Chapter 15: 296-318) on the ways landscape is understood and valued and how this affects research; most of the experiences of the fourth part, but especially the piece on ethics by Gustafson and Karlsson (Chapter 24: 478-495); and the great last chapter by Phillips and Gilchrist (Chapter 31: 673-693) on disabilities and archaeology.

In total, the book consists of 31 chapters that we can now add to the extending bibliography about public archaeology. I am not sure whether one can learn what public archaeology is from the book or not. We might not be in a position to write a handbook yet. But what I am sure of is that this book is a valuable resource, from the texts themselves to their great bibliographies, for anyone wanting to delve into a variety of topics around public archaeology. My last thought, "a step forward", is my conclusion above any critique. It is true that I would have liked to also read about other views and topics. I expected more popular culture, some alternative archaeology, a bit of economy, deeper politics and theory. However, we have plenty of time to complement this and other books with more and more works that put public archaeology in the place it deserves. Meanwhile, *The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology* is another great initiative that helps us explore different ideas and practices to engage with the public and design our projects. As the editors conclude in their introduction, "we hope that you will have not only discovered what we know about public archaeology, but also questioned and debated our knowledge and opinions. In this way we might all contribute to redefining archaeology's place in the world."

References

- Almansa, J. 2010. Pre-editorial: Towards a Public Archaeology. *AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology* Vol. 0, 1-4.
- Almansa, J. *et al* 2011. The Azazo Project: Archaeology and the community in Ethiopia. *Public Archaeology* 3(3), 159-179.
- Kondo, Y. 1960. *Tsukinowa Kofun*. Okayama. [Documentary movie]
- Kondo, Y. 1998. *Tsukinowa Kofun*. Okayama, Kibito Shuppan.
- McGimsey, Ch. 1972. *Public Archeology*. New York, Seminar Press.

McGuire, R. 2008. *Archaeology as political action*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Merriman, N. 2004. *Public Archaeology*. London, Routledge.

Okamura, K. and Matsuda, A. 2011. *New Perspectives in Global Public Archaeology*. New York, Springer.

Rodríguez Temiño, I. 2012. *Indianas jones sin futuro. La lucha contra el expolio del patrimonio arqueológico*. Madrid, JAS Arqueología Editorial.

Stottman, J. 2010. *Archaeologists as Activists. Can Archaeology change the world?* Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press.

AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology

Editor:

Jaime Almansa Sánchez

Email: almansasanchez@gmail.com

Assistant editor:

Elena Papagiannopoulou

Edited by:

JAS Arqueología S.L.U.

Website: www.jasarqueologia.es

Email: jasarqueologia@gmail.com

Address: Plaza de Arteijo 8, T-2, 28029 - Madrid (Spain)

--

Cover Image: *Storyboard for a PSA in Philly* (H. Winograd and M. Haas)

Copyright © 2012 JAS Arqueología S.L.U. (edition) & Authors (content)

ISSN: 2171-6315

Quotation:

Almansa, J. 2012. Review: The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology. *AP Journal* Vol. 2, 145-149.

AP Journal is a peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to Public Archaeology. It is freely distributed online on the Website:

www.arqueologiapublica.es

You can also follow us on:

Blogger:



<http://arqueologiapublica.blogspot.com/>

Twitter:



<http://twitter.com/APjournal>

Facebook:



<http://www.facebook.com/APJournal>