

.....

**Paul Bahn (ed.), *The History of Archaeology: An Introduction*, Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2014, 266 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-84172-6**

As archaeologists, the young generation ‘grew up’ with Renfrew & Bahn’s *Archaeology. The Key Concepts*<sup>1</sup>, or maybe with *Archaeology. Theories, Methods and Practice*<sup>2</sup> or, perhaps, any other theoretical work written or edited by at least one of the two authors here. We could, without being wrong, state that they have specialized in offering studies which concern the discipline of archaeology, either by going into explaining its mechanisms, either by following its course from early days to current ones. So, why a new book on the matter? And yet another introduction? I must admit, those were the first questions I had in mind when reading the title of the book reviewed here. An answer came from the work’s *Preface*, where the editor informs us that *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology*<sup>3</sup>, first published in 1996 is out of print; hence, it was time for a new book, a different one (p. vii). But how different did it turn out to be?

In order to find an answer to this latter question, I will first of all draw a brief sketch of the book’s structure and then I will slightly move to its content. Therefore, it opens with a word on the subject and on the work’s editor, and then we naturally have some lists (*of contents, of figures, of key archaeologist boxes, of key developments boxes, of contributors*). The work also contains a *Preface*, some thirteen chapters and a *Conclusion*.

The *Preface* and the first chapter (*The archaeology of archaeology: Pre-modern views of the past*) go to the editor, namely Dr. Paul Bahn, while the *Conclusion: The future of archaeology* has Professor Colin Renfrew as author. The chapters in between, each of them referring to the history of archaeology in a specific land, are written by twelve specialists from all around the world. Without going into heavy details, here are the names of the chapters: Chapter 2 written by Dr. Peter Bogucki – *Ancient Europe: The discovery of antiquity*; Chapter 3, by Georgina Muskett – *The Aegean World*; Chapter 4, by Dr. David Gill – *The Classical world: Antiquarian pursuits*; Chapter 5 written by Dr. Joyce Tyldesley – *Egypt*; Chapter 6, by Dr. Jane McIntosh – *Western and Southern Asia*; Chapter 7, by Dr. Anne Solomon – *Africa*; Chapter 8, written by Dr. Margarete Prüch – *The Far East*; Chapter 9, by Dr. Igor Tikhonov – *Russia*; Chapter 10, by Professor Philip Duke – *North America*; Chapter 11, by Dr. Ann Cyphers – *Mesoamerica*; Chapter 12 written by Dr. Enrique López-Hurtado – *South America*; and, finally Chapter 13, by Dr. Caroline Bird – *Australia*.

On a closer look one can observe that beyond the large areas, some of the chapters focus on some regional aspects and research topics. Either way, archaeology in each studied area follows about the same pattern. This translates into a series of sections, which appear more or less in each of the chapters, apart from the first one, designed as an introduction.

Let us now see what, generally, every step in the past of archaeology means. *The discovery of antiquity* cannot always be documented with certitude.

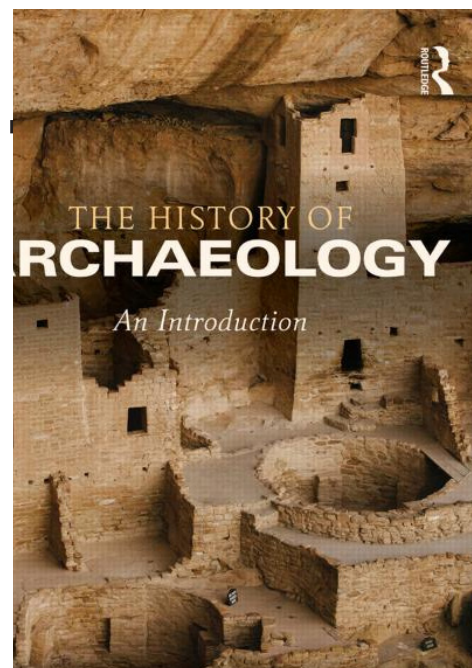
1 Colin Renfrew, Paul Bahn (eds.), *Archaeology. The Key Concepts*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

2 Colin Renfrew, Paul Bahn, *Archaeology. Theories, Methods and Practice*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

3 Paul Bahn (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

## Mihaela Savu

University ‘Babeş-Bolyai’ of Cluj-Napoca  
micaela.savu@gmail.com



DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14795/j.v1i4.79>

ISSN 2360 – 266X

ISSN-L 2360 – 266X

It does, however, refer to a specific moment in archaeology's evolution, in a certain area, when people became aware of the past, when they started wondering about the things they may have noticed for a while, when perhaps they made connections with the available written sources or with oral stories and when they started collecting artefacts, considering them valuable.

That is how we slowly get to *The emergence of archaeology*. And there one encounters pioneers, starting to conduct excavation and to conceive methods of documentation. Some of them and those who followed started *Making sense of the past*. They tried to glue the pieces together, to build chronologies, and to develop theories. This moment, at least in Europe's case, coincided with the 19<sup>th</sup> century's industrial revolution and with nationalism, when the interest in protecting and valuing national discoveries increased. This step got archaeology closer and closer to being *A maturing discipline*. Colin Renfrew sees that 'The basis of archaeology anywhere, good archaeology, is systematic excavation' (p. 239). That is to say that, when stratigraphy was taken into account as a valuable source of archaeological information, along with the context of discovery, and when new techniques were employed in developing excavation methods and in interpreting the discoveries, real archaeology started to take shape. And that happened mostly at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Why *Post-war transformations* and which war? World War II put a pause on many archaeological projects or it really slowed them down. But it also brought to attention new techniques that could be adapted to archaeological realities. Aerial photography, employed since World War I, continued to gain importance. Maritime archaeology saw the light and it started to be applied, in the search for long subdued towns, harbours and lost shipwrecks. <sup>14</sup>C dating was a major breakthrough and its usage started to be employed from the '60 onwards.

Post-war also brought new theories and approaches in the study of archaeology, and along with them new and lasting controversies. *Bringing the story up to date* is a way of listing all the developments that took place in the history of archaeology worldwide since post-war time until recent days, both at theoretical level and in matter of techniques. It also envisages the increasing awareness towards archaeological heritage along with work that still needs to be done in that area.

Now, if one was to look at the way *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology* was structured, they would notice a very similar formula. Apart from the first chapter, named *The archaeology of archaeology*, whose title was used in the current book too, the subsequent titles are: *Old Worlds and New, 1700-1760*; *Antiquarians and explorers, 1760-1820*; *Science and Romanticism, 1820-1860*; *The Search for Human Origins, 1860-1920*; *Archaeology comes of age, 1920-1960*; *New Techniques and Competing Philosophies, 1960-1990*; and *Current Controversies and Future Trends*.

What the authors tried in 1996 was to break the history of archaeology in development stages, based on the characteristics of the periods crossed. This is one of the major changes one can find in the new book. It does sound a bit confusing, considering that I initially drew the atten-

tion upon the similarities. But, to *The History of Archaeology* from 2014 more areas of research were added and, 'Like any area of study, archaeology has no fixed point of origin' (p.1). When there are more regions reviewed, a new variable is added to the one of time, and thus it becomes harder to conceive a unitary history for all the archaeologies. Instead, for the current work, the result is represented by more coherent, homogenous regional trajectories in the history of archaeology, without having to spare important details. A line drawn under all the histories presented in the book catches the diachronic development of archaeology in different areas, due to certain, particular factors: 'in many parts of the world the techniques of archaeology already allow the past history (and prehistory) of a country to be pieced together [...]. In most other areas that position will be reached in the next twenty or thirty years' (p. 239).

All things considered, what is the purpose of this new *History of Archaeology*? As one has probably seen by now, it offers an insight into regional archaeologies and tries to underline how past developments concurred to bringing the discipline where it is today. But beyond that, the book also tried to put the spotlight on those who contributed to the evolution of this field of research. For this purpose, boxes spring all over the work holding information on them or on the important developments.

In the book's Preface the editor stresses on the archaeologists and the importance of their personalities upon the story that ends up being told. That and the fact that archaeology will continue to reshape itself, through the means of new techniques and methods, but also because of the further discoveries that will get us closer to understanding previously un-clarified issues, are some of the reasons named by the editor. We can find this latter reason exposed in the conclusions of the book in 1996, which must mean either that the continuous changes radically modify the history of archaeology every eighteen years or so, either that this is just a nice speech.

At this point, there is no surprise that Professor Colin Renfrew is given the last word, nor is his collaboration with Dr. Paul Bahn. Renfrew sets as an important reason for writing another book on the history of archaeology, the constant struggling for its place in the field of science. He reminds us the greatest progresses made, as he also feels the need to draw the attention on the dangers the heritage of any kind is exposed to. Studies raising awareness on heritage started to be written by archaeologists a while ago, and given the fact that this book might be addressed to a large public, a word on the 'must protect the heritage' could never harm.

But this leads me to some other questions. Who was the book written for? Can anyone read it? There is no word on who is it addressed to, but the book's format should be able to tell us some things. I will start with the cover which depicts the 'Cliff Palace' at the Mesa Verde National Park, in Colorado. The photo was clearly taken during the researches, as we can still see the plates with the site details. Would anyone who sees the book know what the cover is about? I think that might not be important. The image is catchy, depicting an impressive construction which should be able to determine anyone to open the book and find out what that place is all about. The colours and shades also give it a mysterious air,

which drives the book towards the common reader.

We must not forget that we are dealing with 14 authors, including the editor. Concerning the thirteen specialists contributing to the content of the book under review, anyone interested with their background has a special section dedicated to them at the beginning of the work. Having this in mind, it must be mentioned that for the writing style a common ground was searched. Getting from one chapter to another we can hardly notice the voice change, and that is a great plus. There is a simple, flowing course of facts, clearly drawn by the means of the subtitles. The advantage brought by the box method is that it does not break the discourse flow. One can read the content in the boxes later on or even go without it, and still understand the matter under discussion. Sure, we can go without it, but do we really know who was the one that bended the Marxism's methodology to fit for archaeology, and also created a new statistic method (Box 9.2, p.164)? Or that Julio C. Tello was the first indigenous to become an archaeologist of the Americas (Box 12.3, p. 219)?

No references at each and every step! Lately the fear of not omitting anyone has got scholars everywhere to the point where notes or inside references occupy half a page or more, making the content hard to reach. Each chapter of this book - including the foreword, introduction, conclusions and at times the boxes too - ends with a further reading section, for all those interested with reading more on the matter. I find it as a big plus of the book as well as another clue that this book is intended to the large public.

The black and white pictures, depicting sites, early excavations, artefact drawings, or people important to the field of archaeology, were for sure intended to create an image of the past, that past when one could at most take a black and white photograph.

But the work could easily serve as a course book for

the students of archaeology too. It gives important historical data on the discipline, as it acquaintances them with the important specific terms as well as with the people who got it where it is today.

On the down side, if the book is intended to serve a large public, there is a little too much information and some terms that would require the respective public to have some notions about archaeology. That would mean that not just about anyone can read it, but more of an intellectual audience.

While I agree that everything started there and that mostly in that part of the world were the great advances in the field made, there still seems like a bit too much attention awarded to Western archaeology. Surely Paul Bahn has felt it too, since he needed to mention that there will be no apologies regarding this matter. It is a subjective point of view, after all.

Getting back to one of the first questions: why another introduction? The book does not and could not cover all the aspects from the history of archaeology. Nor was the book intended as an encyclopaedia, so just to be specific and avoid critics in this area, *An Introduction* was added to the title. That may seem like an easy way out, by using a cliché, although it may be argued as a clarifying method, a way of better informing. Unless the work was really intended as a course book, in which case *An Introduction* would make more sense.

By all means, the book is a useful tool for better understanding the archaeology, either if it is a student reading it or just a passionate of the field. I feel there could have been some things improved in delivering the content, but I am sure that will be taken care of in a future *History of Archaeology*.