

Making Senses of the Past: Toward a Sensory Archaeology. JO DAY, editor. 2013.

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Reviewed by Robin Skeates, Durham University, UK

This volume confirms that archaeology is coming to its senses, with a growing number of scholars questioning the visual bias of archaeology and taking seriously the multisensory dimensions of life in the past and of archaeological practice. The publication is the outcome of Jo Day's Visiting Scholar Conference hosted by the Center for Archaeological Investigations at Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 2010. It contains an impressive array of 20 chapters: all of high standard, all carefully edited and ordered.

Day provides a helpful introduction to sensual culture studies in general, and to sensory archaeology in particular, nicely closing with the point that "a sensory archaeology allows us to carefully explore previously inconceivable issues related to the very experience of being human in the past." (p. 21). The following chapters range across a spectrum in terms of impact. Some chapters tend to follow previous archaeological studies and to consider just one or two senses. For example, Allen *et al.*'s chapter on the significance of shimmering light effects reflected from lake water onto rock paintings in Canada and New Zealand is a well-argued addition to the rock art literature. Likewise, Pursell's chapter on the visual impact of the red and white sediments coating the Mississippian Shiloh Mounds contributes to previous color

studies in archaeology. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum lie Mongelluzzo, Weismantel, Williams and Murphy's chapters on experiences and perceptions of the sights, sounds and smells of ancient monumental architecture, which are useful extensions to the growing body of archaeological literature on spatiality in past societies and its strategic control by political and/or religious élites. But many of the chapters are truly ground-breaking, often benefitting from an awareness of the growing body of literature on "sensual culture". For example, Holmberg thoughtfully demonstrates how archaeologists can say something about past senses of the environment, particularly in the case of human experiences and memories of volcanic eruptions and landscapes, such as Laetoli in Tanzania, where hominid footprints were preserved in volcanic ash. Tringham's excellent chapter focusses on haptic experiences of the Neolithic tasksapes created by persons through repeated sets of movements and activities at Çatalhöyük in Turkey. And Hunter-Crawley, Day and Dakouri-Hild squeeze the most out of their respective artefact assemblages from Byzantine Syria and the Bronze Age Aegean, moving away from understandings of them as fine art to a broader interest in their embodied manufacture and use and in the impact of their sensuous materialities. Yannis Hamilakis's concluding commentary presents a coherent manifesto for multisensory, corporeal archaeology, echoing the themes of experience, memory and order found in the volume, while also calling for reflexivity.

Although Day denies that the volume can "claim to be a how-to manual for 'doing' sensory archaeology" (p. 2), many of the contributors do not duck this important issue of methodology. Indeed, the volume exhibits a coherent range of valid approaches: from Hopwood's analysis of wear traces on food preparation vessels in ancient Mesopotamia; to Thomas's interviews of makers involved in the experimental

replication of Neolithic Iberian engraved slate plaques; to Weddle's stomach-churning multi-sensory "auto-ethnographic" account of traditional cattle sacrifices in Istanbul, intended to inform interpretations of experiences of Imperial Roman cult sacrifices; to Van Dyke's careful use of creative writing or an "imagined narrative" to bring to life the archaeology of ancient Chaco in the American Southwest; to Foster's curation of museum exhibitions that go "beyond the display case" to appeal to all the senses.

My main criticism of the volume is that all the chapters represent somewhat partial accounts of past lives – certainly, there are no attempts to characterise and compare entire sensual cultures. It is also a shame – given the subject matter – that the book's design, including the conventional grey-scale images, falls well short of the ideal of "hybrid academic, creative media" advocated by Hamilakis (p. 417).

Although not entirely agenda-setting, this is an important volume, not simply because it is the largest collection of essays on sensory archaeology, but also because it confirms that the early twenty-first century "sensory turn" in the social sciences and humanities, heralded by David Howes (2006:114–115), has also reached archaeology.

Reference

Howes, David

2006 Charting the Sensorial Revolution. *Senses and Society* 1(1):113–128.