

# BOOK REVIEWS

## CULTURAL HERITAGE, ETHICS AND THE MILITARY

*Peter G. Stone (editor)*

Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, 2011, xi+228pp, ISBN 9781843835387

### Reviewed by Umberto Albarella

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This edited volume is the third of a Newcastle University (UK) series dedicated to a discussion of the role of archaeologists in managing cultural property in situations of conflict and/or in collaboration with the military. The purpose of the book, as stated by the editor, is 'to place the relationship between cultural heritage experts and the military into both a historical and a wider contemporary context'.

The book begins with an introduction by Stone, providing a background to his involvement with the UK Ministry of Defence in preparation for the invasion of Iraq. This is a well-known story already detailed elsewhere (Stone 2005), and thus here only the main points of the debate are summarised. The chapter also includes a section that Stone specifically dedicates to his 'critics' (Albarella 2009; Bernbeck 2008; Hamilakis 2009) and a commented summary of the remaining contributions.

I will not abuse my role as book reviewer to respond to Stone's comment on my criticism, but I do need to point out, as an aid to the potential readers of the book, that he entirely misses the core point of my argument, quite possibly because I had not explained it sufficiently well in the first instance. More generally, I wish that Stone did not insist on defining any word of criticism as an 'attack', as if we were involved in some form of military combat rather than an academic dialogue. There are other areas of his argument – which are echoed elsewhere in the book – which I also find rather unfortunate, such as his insistence that his opinion represents the majority view. This is an arguable, and suspiciously defensive, claim, particularly in view of the position expressed by the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) general meeting in Dublin in 2008. In addition, Stone (like other contributors) repeatedly confuses the refusal of some archaeologists to collaborate with the military (at least in certain circumstances) with an alleged, and in my view grossly incorrect, unpreparedness in debating with the military.

The first chapter of the book, 'Still in the aftermath of Waterloo: A brief history of decision about restitution', is by Margaret Miles and provides an historical account of plunder and restitution. Though interesting and beautifully written, it is only indirectly related to the subject of the book.

In one of the most revealing chapters, 'Physicians at war: Lessons for archaeologists?', Fritz Allhof (a self-defined 'academic philosopher') discusses the ethical dilemmas associated with the involvement of physicians with the military, then draws parallels with the role of archaeologists. He is strongly pro-engagement and even justifies the possibility of collaboration

in torture and the making of biological weapons. He believes that archaeological organisations should not express opinions on issues of politics and legality, therefore confining academics and intellectuals to the role of technocrats that many governments of the world would so much like to see. His is the sort of argument that would make people like Donald Rumsfeld cheer.

In 'Christian responsibility and the preservation of civilisation in wartime: George Bell and the fate of Germany in WWII', Andrew Chandler discusses Bishop George Bell and his contribution to the debates surrounding military strategies during WW2. The chapter presents us with a remarkable historical figure and an interesting case study, but the relevance to the book is very indirect.

Despite the general title of Oliver Urquhart Irvine's chapter, 'Responding to culture in conflict', this will only be of interest to those engaged with the legality of keeping and acquiring library collections; its link with the subject of the book is tenuous at most.

Chapter 5, 'How academia and the military can work together', is by Barney White-Spunner, an army general who has commanded British forces in southern Iraq. He briefly presents a history of the close relationship between heritage operators and the military through to the present-day 'Operation Heritage' carried out in southern Iraq. A significant omission in this historical overview is represented by the close collaboration that occurred between some archaeologists and the Nazi army as discussed by Arnold and Hassmann (1995).

This is followed by a long, thoughtful and interesting article, 'Archaeologist under pressure: Neutral or cooperative in wartime', by one of the main participants in the debate. René Teijgeler has had experience of working in Iraq during the recent conflict, therefore facing personally some of the dilemmas that he presents in his chapter. His main focus is drawing parallels between the challenges faced by humanitarian and 'heritage' forces operating either during a conflict or, more generally, collaborating with the military. Similarities and differences are highlighted, and the possibility for such operators to be 'neutral' is explored. Teijgeler correctly identifies some of the key ethical issues, though I found the structure of the chapter to be, in places, chaotic, which detracted from the prose. Most peculiar is the inclusion of a section called 'Médecins Sans Frontières', where the organisation is not even mentioned (p.88). I found the logic of some of his concluding arguments also to be confused, with any ideological stand (such as an anti-war sentiment) interpreted as some kind of dogmatism that prevents open discussion. Pacifism is interpreted as feeding 'prejudice' (p.107). Comments such as, 'That the military is, in principle, a bad employer is an untenable position nowadays' (p.107), seem to be far more dogmatic than any of the anti-war (or even anti-military) positions that he refers to in the article.

Chapter 7 by Katharyn Hanson, 'Ancient artefacts and modern conflicts: A case study of looting and instability in Iraq', looks at the extent of looting during the 2003-2009 period of invasion of Iraq, as illustrated by satellite images of archaeological sites.

The article also investigates the evidence of stolen artefacts, particularly seals, smuggled from Iraq. It discusses with concern the possibility that the insurgency may partly fund itself through the black market in antiquities. It does not, however, raise the observation that the destruction of the Iraqi heritage is a consequence of the general breaking down of the overall society that followed the invasion.

In Chapter 8, 'Whose heritage? Archaeology, heritage and the military', Martin Brown deals with the perception of heritage which characterises the military. In particular, he discusses the interest that the military have for their own history and for the excavation of bodies of past fellow soldiers from the recent, as well as the ancient, past. The chapter is mainly of interest for military historians and those archaeologists who engage actively with the military.

In Chapter 9, 'Military archaeology in the US: A complex ethical decision', Laurie Rush informs us that she is an archaeologist who works not 'with', but rather 'for', the US Army (p.139) – an important distinction to make, as Teiggeler points out later in the book (p.210). Her allegation that 'the irony of avowed pacifists behaving in a way that encouraged violent behaviour has to be appreciated' (p.139) is quite extraordinary and unreferenced. We are left in the darkness regarding who such pacifists are and what they do to encourage violence. Rush believes that once an archaeologist accepts work for the military, it inevitably follows that they should equally be prepared to support their employer in situations of conflict, as 'the mission of the military requires the use of violence' (p.142). Moreover, she adds that 'members of the military, at least in the United States, do not have a choice about whether they serve in what they determine to be just or unjust conflicts' (p.142). Both premises provide support to the view that a close link with the military may inevitably lead to a limitation of academic freedom, which is an essential premise underlying sound and reliable research. Like Stone in his introduction, Rush is anxious to move the debate from *whether or not* to engage with the military to *how* to do it. Considering the nature of Rush's employer, such an argument is understandable, but voices of dissent will not so easily be silenced.

In Chapter 10 (by Francis Scardera), 'Akwasasne – Where the partridges drum to Fort Drum: Consultation with native communities, an evolving process', the desirability of creating a relationship of mutual trust between the military occupying/owning a certain territory and local native communities is emphasised. The case of Fort Drum is used as an example of good practice. Politically, it is a rather anodyne chapter, but it would be churlish to argue against its core point.

In Chapter 11, 'Heritage resources and armed conflicts: An African perspective', Caleb Adebayo Folorunso suggests that looting and destruction of cultural property represent war strategies that were introduced by colonial forces in Africa. There is no evidence of such practice in pre-colonial wars and, even in more recent decades, internal African conflicts have shown limited focus on the destruction of property belonging to the opposing faction. He argues that the Hague Convention may only partly be applicable to the African scenario. The chapter is concluded by a statement in support of the engagement of archaeologists with the military. The

fact that, after dedicating his chapter to Africa, the author chooses Iraq as an example of how such cooperation may be effective, illustrates the lack of consequentiality between the core of the article and its final statement.

In the following article, 'Human shields: Social scientists on point in modern asymmetrical conflicts', Derek Suchard mounts a defence of the engagement of archaeologists and anthropologists with the military, including the controversial 'Human Terrain System'. Suchard sees the point of anti-engagement positions merely in terms of preserving the ethical integrity of certain professions, thus failing to understand its wider political implications. He cannot even conceive the possibility of refusing 'support to an armed force engaged in combat operations in war' (p.175). From his narrow perspective the simplistic conclusion that 'if a cultural property or artefact is worth protecting, then efforts to ensure that it is protected should be welcomed by all concerned' (p.175) is all but inevitable.

In the final original paper of the book, 'Politicians: Assassins of Lebanese heritage? Archaeology in Lebanon in times of armed conflicts', Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly presents the interesting case of the discovery of the Roman town of Orthosia beneath the remains of the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared, destroyed during the 2007 bombing. Political manipulation and demagoguery led in 2009 to link the rights of the Palestinian refugees with the backfilling of the archaeological site and the reconstruction of the camp on the same site. In fact, it would have been possible to move the camp to a different, possibly better, location and at the same time to rescue the archaeology, if only there had been political will to do so.

The last section of the book is not new, having previously been published in the *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*. It consists of a foreword by Ian Shearer, a core paper by John Curtis (Keeper of the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum), four commentaries and finally a reply by Curtis to the comments. Many important points are raised, to which it is impossible to give full justice in this review. There is, however, one point made in Curtis' paper, which is important to highlight. This concerns his refusal to engage with the military during the phases that led to the invasion of Iraq, which is explained mainly on the basis of a *political* awareness of the context and of the way his expertise could have been used for motives that went beyond a genuine care for cultural property. I find myself in disagreement with many points made by Curtis, but, in a book in which virtually all contributors appear to be almost exclusively concerned with technical, legal and ethical issues, it is reassuring that somebody was sufficiently alert to reflect on the political implications of his own archaeological work.

As a whole I find that this book mostly presents views that are very conventional and that will be looked at with the greatest sympathy by most military, political *and* academic establishments. There is little thinking 'outside the box' on display and, consequently, I find most of the contributions to be uninspiring, though occasionally interesting. It is true that some views differ between authors, but they do not adequately represent the full range of opinions that have been expressed on the subject. The editor explains the bias with the fact that

those who are critical of engagement with the military refused to contribute to the book. Such a claim seems to be based on the idea that there are two camps – pro-engagement and anti-engagement – in the archaeological profession, whereas I believe in a more complex intellectual scenario. Possibly an ‘anti-engagement’, token opinion was sought and declined, perhaps not without reasons, though this is not made explicit. The book that ultimately emerged contains many elements of interest but readers should be aware that it is unrepresentative of the full range of opinions on the subject and that it is politically, at its best, naive and, at its worst, disingenuous.

## References

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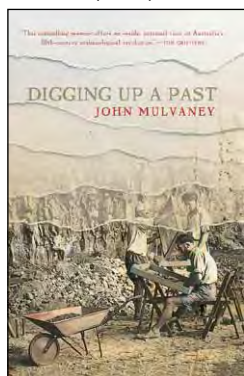
## DIGGING UP A PAST

*John Mulvaney*

University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2011, xiii+348 pages, ISBN 9781742232195

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It is rare in Australia to be able to read the book-length autobiography of one's mentor. In itself this adds a very personal dimension to a book's reading. But in *Digging Up a Past*, this experience is multiplied by the fact that the author, Professor Mulvaney, was the one to instil a hitherto unparalleled level of professionalism to Australian archaeological field and ethical

practice. This book thus represents a rare insight into the origins of modern professional archaeological practice in Australia ('where we come from') as informed by the giant on whose shoulders we all stand, from the personal experiences and viewpoint of the very man who made it all possible.

To review an autobiography is to reflect on the personal account of someone else's life: unless there are ethical issues to stand to account, the review of an autobiography needs to take in rather than judge that person's self-representation and version of events as personal experiences and values. This is an easy task to do in this case, partly because Mulvaney's words come from someone renowned for his straight-talking,

and partly because he himself has, and continues to, set the very highest standards of ethical practice. In short, Mulvaney is renowned for 'talking the talk' and 'walking the walk': he is unmatched for speaking and writing in clear language, for speaking to social issues when required, and for fighting various causes without mincing words while at the same time deeply understanding the political realities of the situation at hand. And here in this book we have these two strands intermixed: a personal record of those aspects of life that Mulvaney has chosen to share with the world, as a 'family history' for his own kin; and a setting straight of the record for the sake of the discipline and the broader public and political field in which he has been involved all his professional working life. This book is a balancing act between these two aims – the personal and the public – but then again so are all published autobiographies. What we are left with after reading the last page is a sense of the social, political and archaeological scene starting around WWII to the present day, focusing especially on the discipline's key professional formative years of the 1960s to the late 1980s.

*Digging Up a Past* has 18 chapters: 1. A country youth; 2. RAAF service; 3. History recollected, 1946-51; 4. An archaeologist abroad, 1951-53; 5. Dawn of Australian archaeology, 1954-64; 6. Adventures in archaeology, 1965-69; 7. Globetrotting; 8. 1971-76 in retrospect; 9. Museums and heritage; 10. An English interlude 1976-77; 11. A surfeit of committees; 12. A Harvard year, 1984-85; 13. A rewarding retirement, 1986-89; 14. The Australian Academy of the Humanities; 15. Conferences and travel; 16. Confrontations; 17. Years with Jean, 1995-2004; 18. Coda – archaeological retrospect.

My friend and professional colleague Ian McNiven is wont to say to his friends, colleagues and students that it is our professional and ethical responsibility as archaeologists to familiarise ourselves deeply with our disciplinary history, not simply so that we don't just re-invent the wheel or learn from our mistakes, but, just as importantly, as a way of paying due justice and respect to our elders in whose footsteps we stand – a view that I entirely agree with. Professor Mulvaney, technically retired yet still a very active elder of our discipline, gives us numerous examples in this book of the kinds of practical hurdles a professional archaeologist can be expected to face in the course of their professional lives, and it is only by 'taking the bull by the horns', rather than shunning seemingly unsurpassable political situations, that the sought-after social (and archaeological, as a social practice with social outcomes) benefits can arise. I fully recommend this book to all involved in Australian archaeology in any way and, paradoxically at a time when the available literature has outgrown available reading time, particularly recommend it as required reading for undergraduate students intending to become professional archaeologists in Australia. I imagine and hope that my recommendations are not needed for those of us who are personal friends or colleagues or students of Professor Mulvaney's.