

Cosmopolitan Archaeologies

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Cosmopolitan Archaeologies. Introduced and edited by Lynn Meskell. Durham, NC; London UK: Duke University Press, 2009

Cosmopolitan Archaeologies, introduced and edited by Lynn Meskell, is comprised of ten essay-chapters all inviting a reassessment of traditional relations within and without the field of archaeology. The book's scope extends to touch on questions of practice and fieldwork, morality and ethics, as well as on the nature of new relationships needed to meet commitments of global responsibility and relation. One of the main targets of the collected essays is to investigate the possibilities of a new role for archeology in an increasingly complex international environment and political climate. At the heart of this investigation lies the analysis of what "cosmopolitan" approaches can offer in the face of a seemingly chaotic reality. What emerges out of these finely argued and selected essays is a reinvigorated sense of the applicability and importance of archaeology, beyond its subject boundaries. Functioning in an interdisciplinary manner each essay reaches out to philosophy, literary theory, politics, and economics, among other fields, to nourish a better understanding of cultural and global capital and flux.

Of particular interest in this study is the desire to develop a new understanding of key terms such as site, location, proximity, distance, hospitality, relation, and limits. This attests to the indelible mark post-structuralist thought and twentieth century philosophy have tacitly imprinted on the methodology carried out in archaeology. If the field is primarily invested in organizing an understanding of immediate rapports to a "site" or a "location" then it seeks to go beyond that site in a manner that comprehends a fixed location in relation to its region, to its nation, and to the world; this is the newly imparted role attributed to the cosmopolitan archaeologist.

The roles and responsibilities for the field and its practitioners, the contributors argue, should be inherently cosmopolitan in nature and ethos. This means that results of archeological study be geared not only to better understand the past but to see how the past reemerges to affect the present and the future. The findings of the contributors show how the act of "translating" the past is further complicated by the incursion and influx of culture and capital in modern times. By focusing on the "translatability" of "heritage terms and practices across a wide array of sites and locations" the researchers have undeniably sought to place the field of cosmopolitan archeology on safe and credible grounds, making it immune and invulnerable the shortcomings attributed to archaeology plain and simple. More precisely, it is no longer about a subject arriving at a location and trying to be as objective as possible with methodology and reporting. Rather, it is about extracting the positive side of reflexivity in subject-object relations as well as in questioning the material and symbolical implications of "translating" the past. Though by their very nature the terms "archaeology" and "cosmopolitan" portend an inimical relation, (one being the study of the past of a specific location, the other comprising of less harsh limits, global in scope and forward in aspiration) it is this very paradox which has yielded a productive tension resulting in this insightful contemporary research on archaeology and its implications on a global scale.