

***Archaeology is a Brand!:The Meaning  
of Archaeology in Contemporary Popular  
Culture* by Cornelius Holtorf. Left  
Coast Press, Walnut Creek, 2007. x+184  
pp., figures, tables, references,  
index. \$24.95 (paper).**

Thank Lertcharnit

This volume is a welcome edition to the existing archaeological literature. It is an enjoyable, readable account, written in a friendly and accessible manner—the kind of book for which I have been looking for many years. Holtorf does not merely remind archaeologists across the globe that ours is no longer an exclusive discipline reserved solely for professionals, but also provides insights into how archaeologists and public audiences should forge alliances.

The volume is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces how archaeology, archaeologists, and archaeological evidence have been used in various ways by people outside the profession. Case studies are drawn principally from contemporary European societies, particularly Germany and Sweden, with which the author is most familiar. The chapter illustrates the fact that archaeology, through somewhat modified depictions, is selling surprisingly well in public market places.

Chapter 2 is presented as a diary, and is published in a font that is different from the other chapters. The “diary,” however, is consistent and unique in content; it talks about the author’s experiences in different places in England (e.g., shops, airports,

train stations, hotels, theatres, and bookstores), and the presentation of archaeology through various pop-culture media, ranging from newspapers, brochures, leaflets, TV series and programs, cards, and advertisements. The chapter implicitly points out that archaeology amazingly and successfully captures people's attention in modern society, and that the past can live in tandem with the present.

Chapter 3 presents several case studies regarding the public consumption of archaeology. This chapter focuses exclusively on TV programs and newspapers as the main sources of public information regarding archaeology. Based on limited research, the author argues that aspects of archaeology appear on TV screens and newspaper pages quite frequently. It should be noted, however, that archaeology on TV and in newspapers is somewhat different from archaeology as defined and attempted by professional archaeologists. The archaeology presented in those mass media is largely about adventurous and romantic moments of archaeological practice and techniques (e.g., survey, digging, or fieldwork) and materials (e.g., mummies, artifacts, and hands-on experience), rather than an attempt to understand past human cultures and behavior. This raises interesting questions regarding why public audiences are much more interested in those moments.

In the subsequent chapter (Chapter 4), the author succinctly touches on how "archaeology" is defined in the general public's head. The author refers to case studies carried out in Europe (England and Sweden) and North America (Canada and USA) for examples of public opinions regarding archaeology. Again, though archaeology is well received by the public, that archaeology is quite general. That is, for the public, archaeology is perceived narrowly as "digging," "the past," "civilizations," "ancient artifacts," or "antiquity." Archaeology as popularly perceived is not the scientific study of the human past and ancient human behavior through the systematic recovery and analysis of material

culture as defined by professional archaeologists (e.g., Fagan 2003; Renfrew and Bahn 1996; Thomas 1999).

In Chapter 5, the author continues to explore public thoughts regarding archaeology and archaeologists in greater detail, focusing on portrayal of archaeologists in public eyes (e.g., cloth, character, and tool). This chapter is probably the most enjoyable part of the volume, and, perhaps best describes the images of archaeology and archaeologists in public arena.

Later in the volume, an intensive survey and discussion of archaeologists' roles in society is presented in Chapter 6. The author argues for collaboration between archaeologists and the public to improve the understanding of "what archaeologists think they are doing and what most people believe they actually do" (p.109), through education, public relations, and democracy. This is another thought-provoking part of the volume, and professional archaeologists should read this chapter with particular critical attention.

The final chapter (Chapter 7) summarizes the main points presented in Chapters 1-6. It reemphasizes the fact that the public is "possessed by the past," and consumes archaeology in their own ways.

The volume is well written and lively, and contains lavish and entertaining illustrations by Quentin Drew (who deserves a lot of credit for his excellent illustrations throughout the volume). The volume is a welcome addition not only to the arena of academic archaeology, but also to related fields including cultural resource management, history, heritage studies, and cultural anthropology.

## References

- Fagan, Brian. (2003) *Ancient Lives: An Introduction to Archaeology and Prehistory*, second edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Renfrew, Colin, and Paul Bahn (1996). *Archaeology: Theory, Methods and Practice*, second edition. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Thomas, David. (1999) *Archaeology: Down to Earth*, second edition. Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.