

Tracing the Relational: The Archaeology of Worlds, Spirits, and Temporalities. Edited by Meghan E. Buchanan and B. Jacob Skousen. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015. 200 pages. \$45.00 paper.

The term “relational” pervades current anthropological and archaeological theory. In this collection, “relational” explicitly refers to how people and things are mutually interconnected and relational ontologies are constructed. With an introduction and eight chapters, the authors’ attention to both relationships and movement—through time, space, and even in some cases the cosmos—are what make their contributions to *Tracing the Relational* new. This collection builds upon, and compares favorably to, the similarly themed *Relational Archaeologies* (2013, edited by Christopher Watts). Drawing upon the work of Tim Ingold, this book began as a 2012 session at the Society for American Archaeology and makes the case for applying Ingold’s concept of “meshworks” to the archaeological record. Emphasizing multiple interconnections and their transformations, one prominent part of this approach goes beyond relations to materials or other nonhumans such as animals to include relations with spirits, deities, ideas, and astronomical beings. Each of the chapters is successful in drawing out relationality—although there is a great deal of variation in exactly how this is accomplished. Nonetheless, all of the chapters are strong in bringing life to past North and South American societies.

The introductory chapter by Skousen and Buchanan provides an overview of current archaeological approaches to relationality. They summarize four main critiques that have emerged: (1) a primary use of Western (i.e., colonial) ontologies; (2) the perpetuation of modernist dichotomies; (3) unequal attention to people, places, and things as entities in relations; and (4) the denial of agency to nonhumans. The authors in this book each work towards acknowledging these critiques and find traction through Ingold’s concepts of meshworks and movement. A meshwork is a web of relationships that is constantly changing, flowing, and meandering. Lines connect different entities, flowing together and disentangling at different points. These relatively abstract concepts describe life itself, but how applicable are these for archaeology? The eight case studies draw upon ethnohistory, epigraphy, and indigenous knowledge systems to bring out how people, places on the landscape, things, and the cosmos intersected.

In doing so, the authors are forging new narratives of historical anthropology that incorporate Native American knowledge systems with archaeology. They use the ethnographic and ethnohistoric records to bring out relations in the past. Like many other recent works, “prehistory” is avoided and instead these case studies link the past and the present through the use of traditional histories. For example, Stacie King’s self-reflective chapter on Oaxaca makes an excellent case for considering the entire landscape, not only those places with architecture and artifacts. She challenges the idea that the lack of evidence for occupation meant that these lands were unused and draws on Mesoamerican ethnohistorical and ethnographic documentation of sacred geographies to draw out how people would have moved through the landscape in pilgrimages and other journeys.

The theme of sacred geographies is at the forefront of the most of the chapters in the volume. Margaret Brown Vega brings together connections of mountain peaks, wind, and healing to make the case for the relationality of Andean summit sites. William Romain's creative chapter ties Hopewell roads, the alignment of earthworks such as the Newark Works, and the Serpent Mound in central Ohio to mountain peaks and celestial bodies, especially the Milky Way. Addressing the later Mississippian period, Jacob Skousen also makes the argument that connections were based on lunar alignments, such as standstills. He argues that like smoke and water, these periodic connections may be more fleeting, but no less important to Mississippian societies. A strength of his chapter is that it brings out alternative ways of seeing connections that would have been important to people making pilgrimages to sites such as Emerald Mound near Cahokia, but his reliance on ethnographies from across North America tends to homogenize Native American journeys.

Eleanor Harrison-Buck explicitly addresses the problem of relying on a uniform indigenous ontology. Instead, she argues that incorporating indigenous theory will work best on a case-by-case basis. She illustrates how to do so by deftly threading together Mayan epigraphic, ethnographic, and archaeological data. Similarly, Gerald Oetelaar tacks back and forth between ethnographic/ethnohistoric accounts and archaeological evidence of Blackfoot entanglements. As he makes clear, movement was a major part of Blackfoot society and places on the landscape were and still are archives of traditional knowledge.

Meghan Buchanan's case study draws on Osage ethnohistoric accounts and Carolyn Nordstrom's concept of "war-scapes" to reassess the Vacant Quarter, a period of low occupational visibility in the Mississippian period. Importantly, she brings out the idea that sites, including those where violence occurred, were never abandoned but are remembered and live on through the connections of the deceased with the living. Melissa Baltus also challenges another idea common in the public discourse about archaeological settlements and regions, i.e., "collapse," to talk instead about how relations become *disentangled*. Her chapter brings out how temporalities of relations are manifested through the unfolding of historical contingencies, including revitalization movements, which produce breaks with the past at the same time as they create new futures.

There is much of interest in this volume, both in the ways that contemporary archaeology is moving toward a more historical anthropology that forefronts indigenous worldviews and in its more holistic contributions. The contributors to this volume are cognizant of the pitfalls of dichotomous, Western thinking and are moving in new directions. Applying Ingold's concepts of meshworks may be based on ethnography, but this book offers fresh perspectives on how that application can lead to new archaeological interpretations.

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