

***Nature and Antiquities: The Making of Archaeology in the Americas.* Philip L. Kohl, Irina Podgorny, and Stefanie Gänger, eds. Tuscan: University of Arizona Press, 2014. 248 pp.**

Reviewed by Michael E. Smith

This volume contains detailed historical studies of how scholars in the Americas—primarily Latin America—analyzed indigenous peoples and their material remains in the 19th century. To an archaeologist, the subtitle is misleading. The book is not about excavations and fieldwork (“archaeology”), but rather about objects: collections, collectors, and interpreters. The book’s main point, as stated in the introduction (by Gänger, Kohl, and Podgorny), is that early 19th century scholars had no established set of methods or concepts for analyzing ancient objects, and therefore had to draw on fields like geology, botany, and zoology for inspiration. This is presented as a novel and important insight, but I find it unsurprising. The early 19th century was the heyday of natural science in Europe, when today’s scientific specializations (e.g., geology, botany, archaeology, ecology) did not yet exist as separate disciplines. Scholars like Charles Darwin and Charles Lyell drew on all these fields in their research, and it does not seem at all surprising that similar processes operated in the early development of the sciences in the New World.

In the first section, Miruna Achim writes about Samuel George Morton and New World skull collections; Joanne Pillsbury explores the role of images in 19th century geology and prehistory; and Máximo Farro details the work of 19th century Argentine natural historian Samuel Alexander Lafone Quevedo. Then Adam Sellen describes the work of the Camacho brothers of Campeche, Mexico, as collectors and museum owners; Gänger details the curiosity cabinet of Ana María Centeno in Peru; and Podgorny chronicles the Central American travels of naturalist and con man Joseph Charles Manó.

Susan Roy analyses the social context of William Taylor’s murals of Northwest Coast Indians at the American Museum of Natural History in New York; and Maria Margaret Lopez, Mariza Corrêa, and Podgorny explore the ways that institutes, commissions, and museums incorporated the natural world and indigenous peoples into accounts of Brazilian history. Alice Beck Kehoe then moves the scene back to North America for an essay on archaeology, native peoples, and manifest destiny; and John S. Gilkeson closes the book with an essay on “indigeneity” in the history of North America.

Most authors follow a strict historiographic approach that describes a past setting in great detail, with little consideration for how the ideas or practices fared after the target period. This approach is far superior to the “Whig history” approach, in which ideas and events in the past are evaluated solely in terms of their relevance to present concerns. But the strict approach does have its limitations with respect to relevance beyond the specific historical setting. We learn, for example, that Samuel Alexander Lafone Quevedo worked out a classification scheme for South

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American indigenous languages that was widely admired in the late 19th century. A question immediately sprang to mind: was he right? Did Lafone Quevedo's scheme prove useful as historical linguistics emerged as a scientific discipline? Did later works build on his ideas? Or was this an idiosyncratic work, a dead-end in development of scholarly understanding of South American language history?

Farro's strict historiographic position gives his essay little interest for anyone not studying the history of ideas in 19th century Argentina, including me. Farro's position is typical among the contributors, and as I read through the chapters I found that my interest was antiquarian in nature, paralleling the orientation of the 19th century collectors I was reading about. That is, to me the chapters were quaint curiosities with little connection to ideas or concerns beyond 19th century Latin America.

Then I got to Alice Kehoe's chapter. In direct and forceful prose she describes how early US ideas about natives, nature, and national expansion not only affected policies and actions at the time, but also shaped subsequent developments in archaeology, anthropology, and the federal treatment and social conditions of Native peoples. The historiographic contrast with the earlier chapters is extreme, and Kehoe got me thinking about many issues in archaeology and museum studies today. Gilkeson's essay on indigeneity takes a similar path.

Why are these two groups of essays so different? Did the early actions of Lafone, Centeno, the Camachos and others in Latin America fail to have the same kind of lasting social impact as the U.S. writers Kehoe discusses? Were the historical processes across the New World really so divergent? Or do the different historiographical positions of the writers mask basic similarities between the regions? Although I have some ideas, the essays in *Nature and Antiquities* do not provide any help in answering these questions.

*Michael E. Smith is a Professor in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. He is an archaeologist whose work focuses on societies in ancient central Mexico and comparative analysis of ancient urban societies. He is the author and editor of several works, including The Comparative Archaeology of Complex Societies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). More information on his many projects can be found at [www.public.asu.edu/~mesmith9/](http://www.public.asu.edu/~mesmith9/)*

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