

## On *Museum Anthropology Review* (2007–2023)

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### Abstract

In an editorial, *Museum Anthropology Review* editor Jason Baird Jackson discusses the work and circumstances of the journal in the context of it suspending publication with volume 17.

### Keywords

anthropological museums; ethnological museums; journals (periodicals); publishing industry; publications

### Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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**Museum Anthropology Review**

Volume 17,1–2 (Spring/Fall 2023), pp 1–10

eISSN 1938–5145

<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/mar>

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In an introductory museum work course, the instructor at the front of the room or hosting the online session will likely begin by reflecting on the ways that museums are heritage institutions, chartered to preserve material evidence of the human and natural world across time and space. The manifest function of museums is about continuity, at least as far as museum collections go. There is truth in such first day truisms, but anyone who has worked in a museum also knows that museums are ripe with near constant change. Each of the museums where I have worked had undergone one or more name changes in its history and, more broadly, each had undergone wholesale reorganization, relocation, and renovation projects. Sometimes these are glorious, but sometimes they bring wrenching changes for diverse stakeholders. Collections (and endowments) grow and sometimes shrink. Buildings are built, renovated, leveled, and replaced. Staff and visitor counts also grow and shrink. Museums spit apart and merge. They open and they close. For museums and museums-related institutions, changes come, even if the changes that we want come more slowly than those that we do not want. Ultimately, change is central to most of the stories that museum people try to tell. As the elders of many rural communities have now recounted for many ethnographers, things can, and often seemingly do, get better and worse at the same time.

*Museum Anthropology Review* has undergone a series of changes over the course of its seventeen volumes. I have authored few editorials in the history of the journal, preferring instead to get straight to the business of sharing the work of interesting colleagues from around the globe. When I have authored editorials, they have come as explanations at inflection points in the journal's history. While nothing is certain, I expect that this editorial will be the final one that I write as the editor of *Museum Anthropology Review*.<sup>1</sup> It also comes at an inflection point. In 2019, I wrote about a plan I had to more closely align the journal with the work of the (former) Mathers Museum of World Cultures, which I then directed (Jackson 2019). A year later, that museum had been merged with the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology to form

a new museum, the Indiana University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and I wrote to say, instead, that the journal was now published not by the museum but by Indiana University Press (Jackson 2020). It has been a particular pleasure to work with the IU Press on the publication of MAR in the years since that transition.

We arrive again at an inflection point. In 2021 I consulted with the IU Press leadership and members of the editorial board about pursuing a search to find a new editor or editorial team for *Museum Anthropology Review*. Eager to see the journal thrive and understanding of my interest in handing it on after what will be about seventeen years of editorship, the press empowered a search committee to seek a new editor. That distinguished committee reached out widely and spoke to numerous colleagues, but they were not successful in recruiting a new editor. This circumstance is not particularly surprising. It relates to what might be understood as crucial structural factors shaping both the fields of museum anthropology and museum-based folklore studies and the larger world of scholarly communication. From the moments in which I—almost inadvertently—founded the journal to its current moment in which I think that I am concluding it, I have been particularly focused on both the changing state of the field that I will call here museum ethnography and the changing state of scholarly communications activity more broadly. It is natural then to think about the birth, the fruitful life, and the concluding (for now at least) stage in terms of micro- factors in the field of museum ethnography and macro-ones in the domain of scholarly publishing.

In the world of museum ethnography, there were already at least two key journals publishing in English when *Museum Anthropology Review* started as such. I do not wish to slight other key periodicals that I also value and that are useful to the field, but the two most logical comparators for *Museum Anthropology Review* are *Museum Anthropology*, published by the Council for Museum Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association, and the *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, published by the Museum Ethnographers Group, based in the United Kingdom. I value both of these publications highly. I was the editor of *Museum Anthropology* when *Museum Anthropology Review* began. In that earliest moment, *Museum Anthropology Review* provided a home for an excess of published reviews originally commissioned for *Museum Anthropology*.<sup>2</sup> In that earliest moment, it was also created as a proof-of-concept exercise vis-à-vis open access publishing in the field of museum anthropology and as a possible replacement for *Museum Anthropology* should structural problems then felt acutely within the Council and the Association lead to the end of *Museum Anthropology* (Jackson 2019). A lot has happened (and also not happened) in the world of scholarly publishing since those early days for *Museum Anthropology Review*. I do not propose that this editorial serve as a full analysis of the publishing opportunities and tribulations that have arisen since the middle 2000s. I still hope to reflect in a detailed way on the lessons of *Museum Anthropology Review* but that is a project for another day. Here, the point is that with the support of the Council for Museum Anthropology (for *Museum Anthropology*) and the Museum Ethnographers Group (for the *Journal of Museum Ethnography*), these journals have continued, throughout this period, to thrive despite the difficulties of this era. While the challenges that *Museum Anthropology* faced just before and during my editorship of it were real and existential, they were negotiated and that journal is, as I write this, thriving in terms of its intellectual and scholarly mission. It has faced challenges too, but those are part and parcel of scholarly publishing now (Turner 2021, 2022, 95).

While a search for a new editor for *Museum Anthropology Review* was underway, the editorship for *Museum Anthropology* was also open and being sorted out. For every journal I know—and I have now edited three of them and served on the editorial boards of several more—finding a new journal editor is a challenging problem that has only grown more difficult in recent years. There are many factors underpinning this difficulty. A full enumeration is just too complicated to pursue here, but some of the most obvious factors are the near impossibility of securing release time from other work duties to devote to editorial work, the ways in which serving as an editor “counts for less” these days within contemporary productivity assessment regimes, and the lack of funding to support skilled or student workers to assist in journal production. Even if these and other difficulties can be overcome there is still the matter of opportunity costs. Many museum ethnographers value the existence of publishing venues in which they can share their work with colleagues, but many fewer feel both able and willing to devote the sometimes-extensive labor that goes into editing a journal. When push comes to shove, finding a willing and able editor is extremely difficult. This was true when I began my career as a journal editor with *Museum Anthropology* in 2005, but it is truer now than ever (Kreps 2005).

The more resources a university press, commercial press, scholarly society, museum-based, or academic unit-based publisher has at its disposal to put behind a journal, the easier the work of editor will be and the richer its scholarly and professional work as a publication can be. When I was Director of the former Mathers Museum of World Cultures, I saw *Museum Anthropology Review* as a publication that could raise the profile of the museum within the field and I was then in a position to use museum resources for its publication. These were not extensive except that, as Director, my university had allocated to me a graduate assistantship that I could use to advance the work of both my research and the work of the museum. For the time of my Directorship, working on *Museum Anthropology Review* as an editorial assistant was a key part of this assistantship. I was thus then able to leverage work of the museum to support the journal and the work of the journal to support the museum. In the years since (2020–2023), the journal has gained new resources in the form of first-rate design, typesetting, and marketing support from IU Press but I have done the work of editor alone without a graduate assistant. Part of the job got easier and much better while another part got harder. Every small academic journal is constantly adjusting to these kinds of shifting dynamics. Sensible people when considering being a journal editor weigh the nature, duration, and intensity of the work involved and make personal decisions as to whether taking on this new duty makes sense to them or not. Many more people consider being journal editors than actually take up the work. I am thankful to have been in positions in which I felt that I could take on this work, but I am not surprised that few now feel themselves to be so positioned. *Museum Anthropology* is in its 46th year of publication and it has the entire membership of the Council for Museum Anthropology behind it. If I were asked which to prioritize—in a world with only one possible editor—I would choose to continue *Museum Anthropology* over the more idiosyncratic and individualized *Museum Anthropology Review*. I definitely wanted the search committee to find a new MAR editor and I would have loved to see what that editor or editorial team would have done with the journal, but I am not shocked that they did not identify someone for the press to hand *Museum Anthropology Review* on to.

I am not shocked because I still watch scholarly communication work closely. While I have stepped back from the front lines of open access advocacy and scholarly communications reform work, I am still committed to these issues (Kelty et al. 2008; Jackson and

Anderson 2014). I serve on the Faculty Board for the IU Press and, in that role, I continue to learn much about the changing world of scholarly publishing. I also still edit the Material Vernaculars book series for IU Press. That series continues to thrive as an experiment in publishing high quality monographs in museum, material, and visual culture studies in both print and free digital editions. I take note when other journals suspend publication for lack of resources or editors, as recently happened with *Anthropology of East Europe Review* with its 38th volume (Channell-Justice 2022). I also watch as new journals are born. Of special note on that side of the ledger is *Museum Worlds*, which has published ten volumes as of late 2022. It thus was launched after *Museum Anthropology Review*, but with a wider interdisciplinary mandate.

Before concluding this conclusion, I want to stress that the success of *Museum Anthropology Review* during the period 2007–2023 was due to the enthusiasm and substantive support offered up by the community of museum anthropologists, museum ethnologists, and museum-minded folklorists in North America and around the world. It was an honor and a pleasure to engage with so many outstanding colleagues in my fields. In preparing this closing editorial, I worked my way back through the past volumes of the journal. Rather than using the efficient but impersonal reporting tools baked into Open Journal Systems, the journal’s publishing platform, I worked through the journal’s volumes and numbers “by hand” seeing what had been published over the years and tabulating it all in the old-fashioned way. I was excited by the vast sea of writings that MAR has published, but what struck me most clearly was the very large community of museum workers and scholars who gathered around, and in, the journal over this period. MAR published a lot of material in a large and, to an extent, innovative range of genres across its volumes (Tables 1–2). That is meaningful to me and, I hope, to others as well, but what is really most significant to me are all of the many people—hundreds of friends and colleagues—whose insights and contributions are represented in the journal. I was particularly moved in realizing how many authors published in MAR are now deceased. But in a happy inversion of this sad reflection, it was also exciting to see how many emerging scholars and professionals published some of their very first work in MAR and how these authors are, in many cases, now true leaders in the field. All of this reflection just evokes the reality that MAR was not only successful but was successful because many people—authors, peer-reviewers, publishers, and many others contributed to it and made it a success.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1. Published Work in *Museum Anthropology Review*, 2007–2022.

Genres	Number
Peer-Reviewed Articles	50
Peer-Reviewed Object Studies	1
Translated Articles	2
Project Reports	13
Review Essays	19
Obituaries	1
Commentary	4
Editorials	5
Journal Reviews	2

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Map Reviews	1
Digital Reviews	3
Exhibition Reviews	18
Database Reviews	2
Media Reviews	8
Book Reviews	262
Book Notes	58
Announcements	1
Letters	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>454</b>

Table 2. Number of Pages Published in *Museum Anthropology Review*, 2007–2022.

Volumes/Years	Published Pages
1/2007	203
2/2008	139
3/2009	180
4/2010	269
5/2011	155
6/2012	118
7/2013	279
8/2014	138
9/2015	222
10/2016	177
11/2017	55
12/2018	162
13/2019	112
14/2020	111
15/2021	121
16/2022	189
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,630</b>

In terms of collective contributions fostering collective success, I can also report that materials published in *Museum Anthropology Review* have been widely and actively read, used, and cited. A list of the ten most accessed works appearing in MAR is given in Table 3. Drawing on Google Scholar (an imperfect but useful tool), Table 4 gives a list of the ten most cited works appearing in MAR. Just as much more work could be done reflecting on the publishing and open access lessons of MAR, much more could be also done to understand its bibliographic and bibliometric status and impact. Thankfully, the journal will remain available online through the efforts of the Indiana University Libraries and use of MAR content will continue to grow.<sup>4</sup>

Table 3. Top Ten Items for Reported Views of *Museum Anthropology Review* Content, 2008 to early 2023.

Published Work	Total Reported Views (to January 19, 2023)
Swan (2010)	5,570
Hollinger et al. (2013)	4,822
Anderson and Christen (2013)	3,305
Hall-Araujo (2010)	3,077
Yohe (2012)	2,937
Bell, Christen, Turin (2013)	2,843
Hennessy et al. (2013)	2,686
Kay (2010)	2,445
Geismar (2013)	2,342
Parker (2009)	2,130

Table 4. Top Ten Items for Citation from *Museum Anthropology Review* via Google Scholar.

Published Work	Citations Noted by Google Scholar (to January 19, 2023)
Anderson and Christen (2013)	90
Hollinger et al. (2013)	78
Rowley (2013)	78
Hennessy et al. (2013)	75
Bell, Christen, and Turin (2013)	74
Geismar (2013)	47
Leopold (2013)	37
McMullen (2008)	34
Noyes (2011)	30
Brown (2012)	29

While a journal is built and sustained through the work of individuals, institutional contexts matter greatly. *Museum Anthropology Review* would not have existed in its mature form without extraordinary support provided by the Indiana University Libraries and its remarkable IUScholarWorks Journals initiative. All IUScholarWorks Journals, of which *Museum Anthropology Review* was the first, are published using Open Journal Systems, an extraordinary tool built and maintained and improved by a tremendous global community of publishing and information technology professionals committed to open access publishing and open-source software. During its time as an initiative of the former Mathers Museum of World Cultures, the journal directly benefitted from museum resources and from support provided by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research of the Indiana University Bloomington campus. At its launch, the journal benefitted from the encouragement of the board of the Council for Museum Anthropology and from the senior faculty in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. During the period between 2019 and 2023, Indiana University Press did extraordinary work to elevate and advance the journal and I am

thrilled that the press remains committed to supporting the work of museum anthropology and museum-focused work in folklore studies in the years ahead.

Some individuals, and I think that they know who they are, were with me at each step of the way as *Museum Anthropology Review* arose and, for its time, flourished. The journal's editorial board and especially its student assistants are part of this group, but so too are other colleagues who were especially eager and active in supporting me and supporting the journal. I do not risk offering a partial list of names here, but I want to thank everyone who leaned in to make *Museum Anthropology Review* a success. No journal publishing peer-reviewed work can advance without the hidden but invaluable work of peer-reviewers. I close by thanking them for their generous service and by urging everyone who reads these closing works to thank all of the peer-reviewers whom you know and to volunteer for this vital service.

## Notes

1. This editorial is published as the only contribution to volume 17 of the journal. I have a friend who was understandably proud to have secured a place in one of the most distinguished and longstanding journals in social and cultural anthropology. The joy of seeing that work through to publication was dampened significantly when learning, upon its publication, that it had appeared in the final issue of this distinguished journal. I have endeavored to manage the work of the journal so as to arrive at this point without unpublished content. Honoring one of my most important mentors and a key figure in the field, *Museum Anthropology Review* 16 (1–2) was a wonderful final double issue for me to conclude my editorship with.
2. Nobody: Why did you commission too many reviews? Me: As the AAA struggled to fix the financial and structural problems in its publishing program, there was a time during my *Museum Anthropology* editorship in which publishing more content was seen (by a then-key AAA staff member) as a way of raising more revenue, both through the ability to charge more for larger volumes and by having a larger footprint in the total body of aggregated content. I am being too simple, but the crux of the answer is that for a time editors like me were encouraged to produce more content. Later, a different reading of the situation meant that there were no resources to publish more content. This led to some commissioned reviews being published in *Museum Anthropology Review* with the consent of the individual authors. Additionally, in this period, some AAA sections were experimenting with publishing some content, reviews in particular, outside the covers of their journals on the open web. This raised real preservation problems, but it was part of the confusing and dynamic nature of publishing in that time (the early and middle 2000s).
3. I had hoped to publish works in Indigenous languages and did not realize this goal, but I am proud that during its run, *Museum Anthropology Review* published works in languages other than English and, as well, published English translations of work published initially in other languages.
4. For those with deep preservation anxieties, I note that I intend to suitably archive at least two paper copies of the entire run of the journal as soon as I can complete work preparing them.



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