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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Book Review: The Archaeology of Time Travel. Experiencing the Past in the 21st Century, edited by Bodil Petersson and Cornelius Holtorf

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Archaeological time travel, or experiencing the past through re-enactment, virtual reality, popular culture or other means, is presented from multiple perspectives in *The Archaeology*

of Time Travel. Experiencing the Past in the 21st Century, edited by Bodil Petersson and Cornelius Holtorf. The book is freely available in pdf format at <http://www.archaeopress.com> (the printed version costs £38.00 + shipping).



The editors have put together a strong collection of papers that contains practical examples of time travels, methodologies, and thoughts on the meaning of time travels, as well as insightful perspectives on important terms such as 'authenticity', 'experiential', and 'fiction'.

The preface is, quite fittingly, in itself a time travel of sorts; it presents the outcomes of an archaeological project on time travel that started in 2007 and that also led to the publication of this book. Chapter 1 (Holtorf) provides an interesting discussion on the term 'time travel', and the book ends with a refreshing argument for the conscious use of anachronisms in time travels in Chapter 13 (Petersson). The rest of the book is divided into five parts, each focusing on a different aspect of archaeological time travel. Each part consists of two to three chapters, followed by commentaries from other researchers, providing alternative perspectives and reflections on issues raised in the main chapters. Because the commentaries also invite the reader to further reflection, they represent one of the strengths of the book.

Part One: Emerging Possibilities in Virtual Time Travels

The first part of the book presents case studies on using virtual reality to facilitate time travel. The use of digital 3D techniques to reconstruct a 12th century crypt and conduct virtual simulations of the use of space in the crypt is examined in Chapter 2 (Dell'Unto, Nilsson and Wienberg). Chapter 3 (Ljungar-Chapelon) describes an interactive installation of a Bronze Age rock art scene and discusses how to engage museum visitors through artistic and archaeological knowledge. The importance of these studies as examples of the possibilities of technology are pointed out in both commentaries (Stenborg and Huvila) on this part of the book. However, I find that both chapters could have provided better discussions on the constraints of the methods and other factors that artists, technological solutions, and participants bring to the time travel experience.

Part Two: Time Travel as an Educational Method

Kalmar County Museum and the international organisation Bridging Ages have collaborated on using time travel to learn from, reflect on, and understand contemporary issues, and some of these projects are outlined in Chapter 4 (Westergren). The experience of the participants in time travel is in focus in Chapter 5 (Ammert and Gustafsson). The commentary (Trenter) to these chapters focuses on how time travel can form bridges between the past and the present. This part of the book highlights how the time travel experience can produce meaningful stories for the participants. It provides a good starting point for discussions on the practical approach to time travel and the learning experience provided by such events.

Part Three: Living the Distant Past

The historical overview and critical assessments of performances and re-enactments in Chapter 6 (Samida) gives an important background to the following evaluation of the potentials and limits of archaeological time travel. Chapter 7 (Daugbjerg) examines the practice of time travel and discusses the terms 'experimental' and 'experiential'. In chapter 8 (Holtorf), the last chapter in this part of the book, it is argued that storytelling, experiences, and time travel are changing the importance of objects in archaeology. In the comments, Paardekooper points to the importance of public outreach in his commentary, while Nielsen touches on 'authenticity' in time travel. Authenticity is an important keyword in this part of the book, which provides several examples for reflection and further discussion.

Part Four: Time Travel on Screen

You might want to watch the movie *Waterworld* (1995) before reading Chapter 9 (Petersson), which analyses the movie as a time travel experience. I certainly wished I had, as I would have understood the analyses in this chapter better if I knew the plot and characters of the movie. Chapter 10 (Kobińska) mentions, perhaps as expected, both Indiana Jones and Lara Croft in the first sentence, and goes on to discuss various movies and aspects of archaeological time travel. Even more movies referring to time travel are listed in the commentary by Colomer, while Hillbom highlights strengths of the chapters and the importance of fiction as a method for time travel in his commentary. The relationship between fiction and reality is underlined in this part of the book, and Chapter 9 shows in detail how futuristic films can also be of relevance to archaeological time travel.

Part Five: Time Travel and Contemporary Society

Histotainment and living history is the topic of Chapter 11 (Fenske), which examines time travel as a contemporary cultural construction. Chapter 12 (Holtorf and Petersson) contains an interesting interview with sociologist Erika Andersson Cederholm who, amongst other things, reflects on experiences and time travels. Småberg expands on this in his commentary, where he shows how time travel can explore the border between fact and fiction, and Knudsen touches on time travels to the past as an instrument to a better future. This part of the book provides insights that complement arguments raised in previous parts, and provides a strong ending to the book.

The book as a 'package'

I enjoyed reading the book from cover to cover and found that it works well as a package of insights on time travel. The editors have put together a strong collection of papers that contains practical examples of time travels, methodologies, and thoughts on the meaning of time travels, as well as insightful perspectives on important terms such as 'authenticity',


'experiential', and 'fiction'. I also found that the weaknesses in some chapters to a certain extent would be compensated for in other parts of the book. The mentioned lack of discussion of the factors participants bring into the time travel in part one, for example, is addressed through discussions in later chapters. That being said, several of the chapters would also work well as stand-alone starting points for discussion. In conclusion, I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in archaeological time travel.

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