Editors:
Jaime Almansa Sánchez & Elena Papagiannopoulou

www.arqueologiapublica.es

AP:

Online Journal in Public Archaeology

INDEX

REVIEWS

David MENNEAR

Blogging Archaeology
[D. Rocks . Macqueen
and C. Webster (Eds.)]

Sheffield: Landward Research Ltd,
Succinct Research and DIGITEC LLC
ISBN: 978-0-9572452-1-1
294 pages, 2014

Free E-Book and Download
http://www.digtech-llc.com/blogarch-ebook/

   The Blogging Archaeology book, published in April 2014, is a welcome and innovative addition to the world of archaeology publishing. It is one that helps push the current corpus beyond the core stable mates of journal articles and monographs (largely read by specialists and often out of bounds to non-academics) by harnessing the relatively new digital media format of blogging to highlight up-and-coming archaeologists' thoughts about the act of blogging archaeology for a general audience. It must be said that it is also an invigorating and interesting read that deserves to be widely read within the profession of archaeology and by members of the public alike. This should hopefully be the case, given that it is a free e-book and thus available for all who have internet access. Furthermore, the publication manages to capture an interesting and diverse point in time in the development of the

communication of archaeology to wider audiences as it actually happened. This may be the book's truly unique selling point.

Produced and published on the eve of the April 2014 Annual General Meeting of the Society for American Archaeologists (SAA), held in Austin, Texas, this book was a response to the 'Blogging Archaeology, Again' session, which some of the international contributors to the book could not attend personally. Nevertheless, the book brings them together with 18 chapters that discuss the motivations and implications of blogging archaeology online. This broad outline (which helps easily pigeonhole the book into any one archaeological genre) ranges from individuals writing reflexively about the act of thinking about archaeology itself to discussions on the impact that blogging archaeology has had, and continues to have, on the 'real' world. First and foremost, it should be noted that this is a diverse book, covering not only the engagement of the blogging medium from an archaeological use but also as an evaluation and criticism of that very process. Whether in the academic (as Kristina Killgrove amply demonstrates in her chapter on the various methods used in teaching public engagement in anthropology) or in the commercial world (Chris Webster's informative take on why Cultural Resource Management firms in America are afraid of the use and power of social media), Blogging Archaeology deftly illustrates the wide-ranging uses and hazards of the blogging medium.

The project that helped give birth and produce this free publication was the blogging carnival that was hosted on Doug Rocks-Macqueen's own blogging website ahead of the SAA meeting in April 2014. Starting in November 2013 by openly inviting archaeology bloggers to write on their own sites each month, for over 6 months in total, in response to a question related to blogging archaeology generally, Doug carefully collated the responses on his own site, often documenting more than 70 active participants per

month in the run-up to the SAA meeting. As a relatively active archaeology and osteology blogger myself, I should perhaps admit here that I too took part in this adventure. However, and much to my subsequent disappointment, I did not manage to produce an article on time for this publication, the fruit of Doug's blogging carnival and of the 'Blogging Archaeology, Again' session at the SAA 2014. The book was published at the exact same time that the session in Austin took place; as some of the presentations of that session were actually included in this publication, this is something of a first for an archaeology conference publication and, possibly, for an academic conference in general.

It has been noted by archaeologists that the act of blogging itself, and of keeping a blogging site regularly updated, is but one facet of social media and of the new wave of the public archaeology movement in general, but importantly one which the public are freely able to access (Richardson 2014). Blogging as a medium alone is, as the paleoanthropologist and much valued blogger John Hawks has stated[1], an act of tertiary importance compared to either lecturing or actively researching and publishing in the academic sphere. However, blogging is of importance to both the blogger and their audience (whether this is the general public and/or other archaeologists and academics) and, as this book demonstrates well, it is a rewarding experience for the public and the blogger alike, regardless of their archaeological background (Downey 2011). Across the Western world in general, a rise in public engagement and interactivity with archaeologists on a personal and a professional level has been noted. Blogging, both as an identity and as an act of education and outreach, is an important weapon in the armoury of an archaeologist though, helping to break down the boundaries of what archaeology actually is, why it is important and how it is actually carried out. The value attached to blogging is, of course, priceless, especially in a time where austerity affects

1 http://johnhawks.net/weblog/hawks/about.html

many countries, and where the value of archaeology itself (either in purely economic, cultural heritage or public awareness terms) must be seen and must be recognised. In this regard, Sam Hardy and David W. J. Gill's chapters on conflict and looting (respectively) resonate loudly, as does Maria Beierlein de Gutierrez's informative chapter on Central and South American archaeology and the impact of blogging on both the author and her research interests. Archaeology cannot be separated from the present tense, or from its past and present cultural context.

This, though, works both ways and is something that the book highlights quite well. The act of blogging is time-consuming – it has sometimes been compared to a part-time job (Killgrove, in Rock-Macqueen & Webster 2014) – but it can also help build coherence between the varying sectors of archaeology as a whole (be they volunteer, commercial, academic, or, on an individual level, personal and professional). Although there is real risk attached to blogging openly regarding the employment conditions of a career in archaeology, there are great gains to be made by solidifying a reputation on an international platform. Moreover, and as Emily Johnson highlights in her #freearchaeology chapter, debate can be inspired on a truly enormous international scale via social media. This can be documented, stored, exchanged and enacted upon. There is a danger, as both Richardson (2014) and Clancy (2011) highlight, that this communication, initially started in an idealistic democratic fashion, will become redolent of the typical structure of archaeological research by becoming 'top-down', where the reader becomes the audience who is communicated 'at' rather than 'with'. There is the danger that this can become a one-way conversation, where established archaeology bloggers become a dominant force, thereby unintentionally putting a stranglehold on other archaeological bloggers seeking that first initial foothold.

As mentioned above, it can be hard to determine where the audience of this book lies within the archaeology profession itself. Blogging, the act of writing a rolling online publication in discrete entries, has long been used in academia, particularly by early-career scientists and doctoral students who want to increase their own profile and study focus within, and outside of, academia itself (Clancy 2011, Downey 2011). Commercial units have, in the more recent past, begun to warm to the value of producing a blog to meet the interest of both the public and archaeologists on the projects that they are working on, or have worked on. After all, it is the public who help decide the value of archaeology as a profession and whether it is worth spending capital on in the first place. However, this book does not represent a new era in the publishing of articles directly from the bloggers themselves. Other examples of self-published e-books by bloggers include 'Social Media in Social Research', a wide-ranging book discussing the implications of social media for both researchers and the public, written by 53 contributing authors and edited by Kandy Woodfield (2014), and, much more arcanely, the e-book entitled 'Archaeology, Anthropology and Interstellar Communication' edited by Douglas A. Vakoch, which brings together a range of specialists to detail the best methods in establishing meaningful communication with extraterrestrials. As Richardson (2014) and Price (2010) mention, there is the question of trust and authority placed by the reader upon the writers. This can potentially be harder to establish with archaeology bloggers online, where a veritable mountain of pseudoarchaelogy awaits the uninitiated, and where conflict between opinion and fact can be hard to distinguish. As such, Rocks-Macqueen and Webster's publication should rightly be lauded as helping to introduce valuable and much respected archaeology bloggers to a wider audience. What is especially true in this volume is the singular voice of each participant and that there is very little bland academic language, which can so often frost over one's eyes and is found in academic journals or monographs.

Available only in the electronic form of an e-book, either as a free download or as a magazine-style read, the authors have perhaps limited the audience of the book. This was a necessary move given the content and format of the book itself, but also highlights the inherent limitation in blogging archaeology as a whole: that of long-term permanence and the use of, often, free labour. It is no great secret that the world of archaeology relies heavily on volunteers and, in the academic and commercial environments especially, there is great pressure to publish the results of research and investigations. Blogging archaeology is often undertaken because the author has a direct interest in cultivating their own understanding and interactions within a public sphere regarding their research projects and/or interests. If, and this is a big if, greater pressure is forced onto early-career academic archaeologists or commercial archaeologists to produce online content in the form of blogs to enhance communication of specialist subjects, then the very independence of the bloggers, those who are represented in this volume and those who are not, could possibly be compromised, if blogging as a platform becomes, or became, 'mainstream'. There is a very fine line between institutional blogging and independent blogging, where the author is acting independent of their company or institution affiliation in a professional capacity. The act of writing about an archaeological site often entails personal insights or reflexive thinking that has little room in scientific articles or site reports, but can nonetheless engage the errant or regular reader and actively inform and excite.

It is clear that this important publication should be found in archaeology departments across the lands, whether it will or not remains to be seen as it is entirely possible that it may be buried deep in the hinterlands of the internet. It is an innovative publication though as it shifts the goal posts of the act of publication itself into the hands of the very authors of the volume, who thereby maintain total control of the product itself and releasing it when

and where as the authors see fit to. Furthermore the book also acts as a harbinger of a relatively early stage in the great, and ongoing, blogging archaeology experiment. The most important aspect of which is the sheer independence of the blogging authors themselves, regardless of their institution or unit affiliation, and of the wide ranging topics that are both available to them and discussed. So minor quibbles aside, I hereby heartily recommend reading this exciting new publication as a great opportunity to learn about the value of blogging archaeology from the bloggers themselves.

References

Clancy, K. 2011. Networking, Scholarship and Service: The Place of Science Blogging in Academia. Scientific American. Accessed 28th December 2014 at http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/context-and-variation/2011/12/14/science-blogging-in-academia/

Downey, G. 2011. Blogging for Promotion: An Immodest Proposal. Neuroanthropology. Accessed 28th December 2014 at http://blogs.plos.org/neuroanthropology/2011/10/20/blogging-for-promotion-an-immodest-proposal/

Price, D. H. 2010. Blogging Anthropology: Savage Minds, Zero Anthropology, and AAA Blogs. American Anthropologist. 112 (1): 140-142.

Richardson, L. 2014. Iteration, Iteration, Iteration: Digital Public Archaeology and the Presentation of Online Research. London School of Economics and Political Science Blog. Accessed 15th February 2014 at http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/08/14/iteration-digital-public-archaeology/

Rocks-Macqueen, D. & Webster, C. (Eds.) 2014. Blogging Archaeology. Sheffield: Landward Research Ltd in Association with Succinct Research and DIGTEC LLC.

Woodfield, K. 2014. It Started with a Tweet… In: Woodfield (ed.). Social Media in Social Research: Blogs on Blurring the Boundaries. London: NatCen Social Research.

AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology

AP Journal is a peer-reviewed journal devoted exclusively to Public Archaeology. It is freely distributed online on the Website:

www.arqueologiapublica.es

You can also follow us on:

Blogger:

http://arqueologiapublica.blogspot.com/

Twitter:

http://twitter.com/APjournal

Facebook:

http://www.facebook.com/APJournal