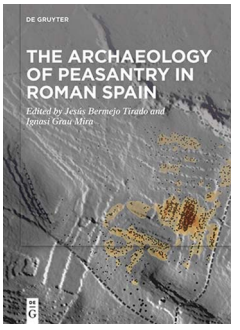
Antiquity 2022 Vol. 96 (390): 1659–1668
https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.155

New Book Chronicle

Claire Nesbitt

The study of contemporary 'peasantries' saw a decline around the turn of the millennium. An academic focus on capitalist farming models over peasant societies led to debates about the very validity of the term 'peasant', with some regarding it as anachronistic (Kearney 1996), while others argued for the emergence of a 'new peasantry' that would become increasingly important (Van Der Ploeg 2018). Most recently, archaeologists Quirós Castillo and Tejerizo-García (2021: 378) have argued that peasantries "appear to be a crucial social agent in many political and economic processes". Indeed, archaeologies of the peasantry are enjoying a revival, particularly among Spanish researchers. This NBC reviews a few of the many recent volumes that feature new approaches to the archaeology and history of peasants, aiming to shift perceptions of the peasantries as passive, reactive societies, and resituating them as communities with agency and social currency.

Jesús Bermejo Tirado & Ignasi Grau Mira (ed.). 2022. *The archaeology of peasantry in Roman Spain*. Boston (MA): De Gruyter; 978-3-11-075720-0 hardback £82.



In a volume resulting from a two-day seminar in 2018, 'Arqueología del campesinado en la Hispania Romana', Bermejo and Grau Mira present 12 papers dealing with the archaeology of peasantries (defined in this volume as rural, non-elite communities), adopting multidisciplinary perspectives and a variety of methods. The volume is divided into three parts: the first evaluates theoretical frameworks and methods, from traditional models that accept the existence of the slave mode of production as a model for the socio-economic structure of the Roman rural economy, to more complex approaches that recognise a range of agents in the rural economy, including smallholders and the rural *proletarii*. Contributors to this section demonstrate that diversifying methods and sources of evidence can bring new insights into rural life. Luz Neira (Chapter 3), for example, considers the visual representation of agrarian tasks in the mosaics of Roman Spain. Neira finds that olive oil production, one of the most significant economic activities in the region, is not depicted in the mosaics; instead, viticulture is the dominant theme portrayed. Neira concludes that, unlike the North African *domini* who chose to represent accurately the agrarian basis of their local estates, the villa owners in Roman Spain opted instead to portray the iconography of Dionysian mythology and to depict themselves as victors over barbarism. The findings reinforce the need to question elite representations of rural labour and to look elsewhere for evidence of the hidden lives of the rural non-elite.

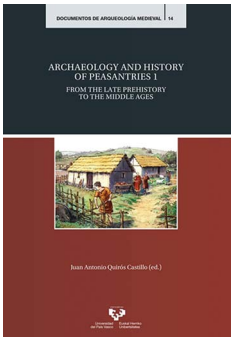
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The second part of the volume duly broadens the search for peasantries away from the traditional focus that has equated rural settlement with villae. Papers in part two diversify the types of settlement under consideration, and reject the binary definitions that contrast peasants with slave-owning *latifundists* or rural *proletarii*, arguing instead for more fluidity and socio-economic mobility. Grau Mira's chapter (5), focusing on archaeological approaches to territorial organisation and economic models, uses the example of the Alcoi Valley to consider how peasant landscapes may have been integrated into the territorial structure of Roman towns. The results show that the subsistence economies of peasant households were not isolated—as demonstrated by the presence of imported goods—and that while small surpluses may not have been of interest to the Roman authorities, these may have been combined into larger shipments, thus representing a more complex and nuanced rural economy than previously thought.

Part three presents a series of studies comparing villae and peasant habitats in broader settlement systems to demonstrate how less visible remains of non-villae sites, non-nucleated villages and smallholdings present new avenues for the study of Roman and medieval rural societies. Overall, the volume aims to diversify the economic activities considered in studies of the peasantry and to push interpretation of rural economies beyond marketable production and profit maximisation. The studies presented reveal how much can be learned about the peasantry though the application of interdisciplinary methods and, in particular, a more detailed, higher resolution approach to landscape archaeologies. In their conclusion, Grau Mira and Bermejo Tirado express the hope that studies of the peasantry in Roman Iberia may be integrated into a broader global context that not only sheds light on the history and archaeology of peasantries, but which also helps to shape the future of rural areas in Spain and beyond.

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (ed.). 2020. *Archaeology and history of peasantries 1: from the late prehistory to the Middle Ages* (Documentos de Arqueología Medieval 14). Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco; 978-84-1319-252-9 paperback €20.



Also focused on the history and archaeology of peasantries in Spain, though taking a broader chronological perspective, are two volumes edited by Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo. The first volume, *Archaeology and history of peasantries 1*, marks the beginning of a series devoted to the study of pre-industrial peasantries in the Iberian Peninsula and Europe more widely. Dealing with the archaeological evidence for peasant economies and land use, volume 1 presents nine studies ranging from protohistory to the Middle Ages, each considering social complexity, economy and land use, and peasant agency.

Quirós Castillo argues there is a need to refocus attention on peasantries, which have been marginalised or ignored as an outdated area of investigation. Beginning from the premise that "we know too little about peasant societies in the past" (p. 25), the volume goes on to redress this balance. In

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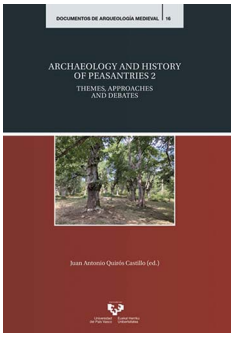
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the first chapter, Quirós Castillo outlines the problems: "resuming a research theme that has undergone such a powerful resizing as that of social history of peasantry requires a critical reformulation of concepts, methods, research agenda and, ultimately, the theoretical framework" (p. 26).

The first three chapters all challenge existing understandings of social and political complexity. Pedro Díaz-del-Río (Chapter 2) confronts the term 'peasant' and reviews its definition and whether it can be applied to the Iberian Copper Age (3200–2200 BC). Díaz-del-Río sees the subsistence agriculturalist as a norm that is only differentiated through "extra-economic extortion" (p. 42). Díaz-del-Río argues that this was the case in the Iberian Copper Age and goes on to consider what the archaeological evidence from that period can reveal about peasant societies. Antonio Blanco González (Chapter 3) continues to trace the social dynamics of peasants through the Late Bronze and Iron Ages in northern Iberia (1200–20 BC). Here, the author argues for "a social history of stateless protohistory driven by nonclass peasants" (p. 55). Blanco González sees clear evidence for peasant agency, suggesting that the peasantry was a resilient social model that survived significant societal transformation and was able to adapt to shifting conditions. Alfonso Vigil-Escalera further examines the agency of the peasantry in Chapter 7, presenting case studies from the early Middle Ages in northern Iberia. These are focused on funerary rituals, which Vigil-Escalera views as evidence for peasant agency in a range of different social contexts.

The stated aim of the volume is "to promote an archaeology of peasantry as a research itinerary that returns to the great themes of social history, albeit from nuanced and renewed perspectives" (p. 27). This is achieved by a move away from a focus on class conflict to understand other forms of social interaction and negotiation; a shift from seeing peasants as subaltern communities, restoring their political and economic agency in the archaeological record and establishing more nuanced and articulated narratives of peasant life. The volume sets an agenda for the future of peasant studies—one that is cross-disciplinary, that resists sectorial treatment and that recognises the agency of the peasantry.

Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo (ed.). 2022. *Archaeology and history of peasantries 2: themes, approaches and debates* (Documentos de Arqueología Medieval 16). Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco; 978-84-1319-370-0 paperback €20.



While the first volume of this new series focuses on the archaeological record of Iberian peasantries, the second widens the geographical focus to Europe, including Scandinavia, and broadens the chronological scope, from prehistory through to contemporary peasantries. The emphases of this volume are theoretical and conceptual issues.

The editor, Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, opens proceedings with a chapter that contextualises this volume within a broader research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, *Peasant Agency and Socio-Political Complexity in Northwestern Iberia in the Medieval Period*, and discusses the themes emerging from the volume's various contributions. The first of these themes concerns concepts and notions of peasant societies from within, as addressed by José-Miguel Lana Berasain (Chapter 2),

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Jesús Izquierdo Martín (Chapter 3), Giovanni Levi (Chapter 4) and João Pedro Tereso (Chapter 5). Lana Berasain deconstructs the concept of 'peasantry', demonstrating that, in Spain at least, the term is a relatively recent construct and reflects the ways that the social sciences have understood rural societies. Izquierdo Martín continues the theme with an investigation into modern representations of the rural past, particularly portrayals that evoke nostalgia and otherness. Here, Izquierdo Martín considers the identity transformation manifested in the projection onto individuals of terms such as 'farmer' compared with 'peasant'—the former implying skilled work and the latter unskilled—and argues that modernity has led to peasants being represented negatively or as subalterns.

The second theme is 'Encompassing societies and peasantries', which considers the role of peasantries within broader society. This section aims to overturn primitivist stereotypes, to restore agency to peasants and to resituate them as a diverse functioning sector of society. Contributions on this theme consider societies in the Iron Age to Roman imperial period (Inés Sastre, Brais X. Currás and Damián Romero), in medieval Christian religious houses (Esther Pascua Echegaray) and medieval Islamic Aragón (Julián M. Ortega).

The final theme is resilience in peasant societies. Rosamond Faith (Chapter 9) compares peasant societies in early medieval England and Provence in an exploration of the nature of the household and the 'moral economy' of the farm as factors in peasant resilience. The author concludes that ensuring the continued integrity and functioning of the farm was of paramount importance and was protected by a series of checks and balances, including limiting entitlement to marry and inherit, and 'exporting' younger members of families to work elsewhere. In this way, the 'moral economy' was every bit as important as the 'real' economy. Eva Svensson (Chapter 11), meanwhile, considers resilience, vulnerability, risk and profit through a study of Scandinavian forest peasants throughout the medieval period.

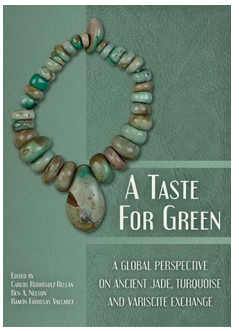
Both volumes in this series offer much to studies of past rural economies and to fuller, more engaged, histories of peasantries. They also serve as frameworks for approaches to contemporary rural issues: as Quirós Castillo argues, whether we look to antiquity or to current issues relating to biodiversity, food security, environmental degradation, displaced communities, high incidence of suicide, women's rights, and the protection of children in rural areas, "studying peasantry is much more than doing an academic exercise, since it has a transformative political dimension today" (p. 24). Whether or not we believe the term 'peasantry' is appropriate across time and space, these volumes are important means through which to confront how we describe class, communities and social organisation past and present.

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Precious objects, special places

Carlos Rodríguez-Rellán, Ben Nelson & Ramón Fábregas Valcarce (ed.). 2020. *A taste for green: a global perspective on ancient jade, turquoise and variscite exchange*. Oxford: Oxbow; 978-1-78925-274-3 hardback £45.



Archaeologists tend to consider materiality within particular temporal or geographic parameters, but some approaches allow the identification of global trends in the societal significance of a particular material. *A taste for green* considers the apparently global appeal throughout prehistory of objects made from green-coloured mineral gemstones such as jadeite, variscite, malachite, amazonite and turquoise. Featuring nine chapters, the volume includes studies on Mexico, the Southwest US, and Western Europe—particularly Spain, France and the UK.

Ma. Teresa Cabrero García's case study (Chapter 2) focuses on the Bolaños Canyon in western Mexico, where the desire for green stone led to the establishment of a new settlement on what was to become a commercial route. Cabrero García argues that, in the Mexican pre-Hispanic world, green stone, such as malachite and turquoise, was considered sacred. These stones, it is suggested, represented fertility, vegetation, water and life. Cabrero García suggests that the Bolaños region was colonised by groups from the complex societies of the Jalisco region because it lay on the most direct route between Chalchihuites—a source of green stone—and Jalisco, from where the green stone was redistributed to western Mexico; the landscape was therefore occupied and reshaped by the quest for green gems. The greenstone industry in Jalisco is also the focus of Chapter 3 by Martha Lorenza López Mestas Camberos, Jasinto Robles Camacho and Ricardo Sánchez Hernández. This chapter considers the production, circulation and consumption of artefacts made from green stone and examines how they helped to transform social groups, in particular during the period *c.* 400 BC–AD 800. Here, the authors begin from the premise that "material objects stimulate, drive or determine social action" (p. 32). Their investigations, based largely on evidence from funerary contexts, reveal that the distribution of these significant green objects can shed light on the processes of social complexification that were beginning to happen toward the end of the Preclassic and the early Classic period. The differential consumption of this material, particularly evident in tombs, demonstrates increasing social differentiation.

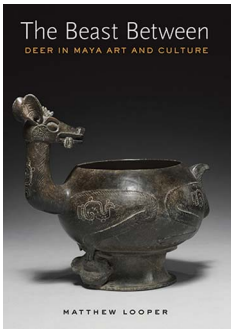
Chapter 6, by Alison Sheridan, Pierre Pétrequin, Anne-Marie Pétrequin, Serge Cassen, Michel Errera, Estelle Gauthier and Frédéric Prodéo, summarises the findings of two major international projects focused on jade, including the circulation and significance of the furthest travelled artefacts in prehistoric Europe: Neolithic jadeite objects (especially axe heads) from the western Alps. The authors chart the exploitation of the Alpine green stone from as early as *c.* 5300 BC through three millennia of exchange and use. Found in inaccessible and in many ways liminal locations, green stone was much sought. Although specific uses varied regionally,

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the authors find several consistencies in the value of green axes. These objects seem to be routinely associated with power—both human and divine—and with immortality. The authors observe that green objects appear to have had gender-specific symbolism (apparently based on burial evidence and phallic imagery, though this is published elsewhere), with disc rings being associated with women and axes, and adze heads and chisels with men. The authors conclude that the mysterious source of the green stone in the High Alps, together with its recognisable colour, explains the broad appeal of these green objects. Richard Bradley and Aaron Watson reach similar conclusions in their chapter (8), which focuses on the Langdale stone axes from northern England. They argue that the remote and hard-to-reach locations of quarries, together with the distinctive colour and the apparent closeness to the sky, made axes from Langdale particularly special, perhaps beyond any functional properties they might have had. The nine interesting case studies gathered in this volume amply demonstrate distinctive human responses to green stone objects that extend across vast geographical areas and long periods of time. A reflective concluding chapter to draw together the themes and to discuss these similarities in human responses to this material would have been welcome.

Matthew Looper. 2019. *The beast between: deer in Maya art and culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press; 978-1-4773-1805-8 hardback $60.



Alongside green jade with its powerful symbolism, the deer also had a special prominence in Maya society. As Matthew Looper explains, this was perhaps because of its role in subsistence—deer was a significant component of the diet, especially for the elite—and perhaps also for its role in ritual practices. Consequently, the deer is frequently represented in both Maya art and inscriptions. Looper's volume aims to understand the use of the deer motif, particularly in relation to socio-political conditions.

Looper opens the volume with a detailed introduction discussing the significance of deer to the Maya and the use of deer imagery. This goes back to basics, considering the approaches of Geertz and Jung. The importance of the deer is traced to its availability as an accessible large mammal that could provide a rich source of protein and fat, although its significance clearly grew beyond that measure over time. Land-management strategies employed by the Maya, such as slash-and-burn cultivation, favoured deer population. The Indigenous exploitation of several species of deer—most notably, the white-tailed deer—is considered in Chapter 1. This co-dependence between Maya societies and deer is reflected in contemporaneous imagery, in which the deer is rarely depicted in isolation but more usually as a package, often with the deer as a secondary focus to a prominent human actor. Representations of deer also appear in a mythical genre that includes anthropomorphism and zoomorphism.

In Chapter 2, Looper explores the uses of various parts of the deer carcass beyond meat. The Maya used all parts of the animal, with archaeological evidence revealing tools and

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ornaments made from deer bones and antler, and also bones carved with historic stories—notably a tibia from Copán, Honduras. Artistic representations provide evidence for other products that are not directly represented in the archaeological record, such as hides.

The link between deer imagery and the Maya elite is addressed in Chapter 3. Looper focuses on an incised conch shell plaque (the Cleveland plaque, probably dating to the Late Classic period) in a case study that demonstrates the association between deer hunting and social status. In this review of the archaeological and iconographic evidence, the picture that emerges is one that privileges deer hunting as a ritual event practised by a predatory social elite. The Cleveland plaque depicts a deer in the guise of an elite man, underlining the association between deer and wealth or social status.

Deer imagery is also linked with sexuality and fertility (Chapter 4), as a metaphor for warfare (Chapter 5) and associated with deities through the ritual of the deer hunt (Chapter 6). Looper argues that "deer can be viewed as a symbol around which the Maya constructed their basic definitions of identity and social order" (p. 191). The deer image appears to have tremendous versatility, being associated with many facets of life; in fact, Looper argues, the liminality of the deer made it a powerful symbol that was appropriated to demonstrate status, domination, fertility, social mobility and socio-economic prowess. Looper's detailed and eloquent volume reveals the complexity of the deer image in the Maya world, which could be used and read in multiple ways to construct meaning. It might also be of interest to those working in other regions and time periods where wild animals appear to have had a particularly special place, such as later prehistoric Europe.

Both this volume and *A taste for green* demonstrate the power of objects and their associated imagery to shape and transform societies and to differentiate between individuals. Access to, or control of, special goods could confer status and power, and the sources of such commodities—whether living, as in the case of the deer, or inanimate such as the green stone—have shaped societies across millennia.

Jessica Joyce Christie. 2021. *Earth politics and intangible heritage: three case studies in the Americas*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6693-6 hardback $95.



As we consider the place of materiality in past societies, we need also to address the role of intangible heritage. Jessica Christie presents three case studies that investigate how landscapes function as settings for memories and places which can be imbued with meaning. The approach is guided by the concept of Earth Politics, defined by the author as "an aspect of critical theory that illuminates how individuals in a society are active participants in creating the reality of their social worlds" (p. 1). Informed by landscape and heritage studies, and archaeology, Christie's case studies show how, for Indigenous groups, intangible heritage is key to resilience in the face of displacement, to resisting assimilation and overcoming colonial systems.

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The volume is divided into three sections, reflecting de-colonisation projects focused on the Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, the Yucatec Maya community of Coba, Mexico, and the Aymara community of Copacabana, Bolivia. These sections are bracketed by an Introduction setting out the aims of the research and a Conclusion drawing together the results. Christie aims to find "new ways of place-making where Indigenous and Western knowledge systems can live side by side and shape a path toward a regenerative planet with all its living beings for the future" (p. 3).

In the first case study—Canyon de Chelly—Christie's decolonising approach begins with a return to the original excavation reports to explore how archaeological detail is removed from interpretations, summary reports and popular media, thereby silencing some of the voices that might be represented. The author uses ethnography to understand relations between the archaeological sites and their current residents, noting the potential for both controversy and sustainable solutions as a result of the interpretation of the archaeology by groups from disparate cultural backgrounds. Christie notes three key findings from this case study. The first is that Navajo or Diné people are alienated by a federally imposed government and must battle with poverty in a system that forces them to participate in a capitalist global market economy that is at odds with their traditions. The second finding is that cultural landscapes are created, sustained, interpreted and destroyed by people, and that these traditional cultural landscapes are not able to survive in the twenty-first century without "dynamic, and reciprocal interactions" (p. 74). Christie argues that Earth Politics reveals the mechanisms that support this interaction. Finally, the spreading influence of Christianity is held up as a principal reason for the changing world view of the Navajo. Whereas Indigenous tradition holds people and animals as equal subjects and agents in the landscape, Christianity's teaching that people are made in the image of God shifts the relationship with ecological systems.

Christie's conclusions are clear: the complex geo-political networks through which Indigenous people and the West are connected mean that cultural landscapes and Indigenous people will not be erased; the concept of cyclical time and movement into reconfigured 'futures' mean that there will be some continuity. Finally, community-based social structures and land-management systems will preserve cultural landscapes and intangible heritage. Christie argues that while archaeology can reveal the physical nature of cultural landscapes, these frozen moments or 'temporal slices' do not participate in the dynamic reality of the twenty-first century; the archaeological record is "buried in the social memory of descendant communities and […] inextricably cross-linked with the social construction of the present and future" (p. 13). This forward-looking volume argues that cultural landscapes should not be viewed as static and idealised, but rather as living human realities held in balance by the needs and wishes of all stakeholders.

These in-depth investigations into the meanings imbued in both objects and places remind us of the inherent difficulties of interpreting evidence. While we may discover the physical evidence for the long-distance exchange of green stone axes, or note the prevalence of a certain type of imagery in regional contexts, understanding the significance that these objects and representations held for their makers and consumers is more complex; even more so the intangible heritage that may be invisible to all but those communities with the emotional, socio-cultural and ancestral investment in a place. These volumes offer

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interesting examples of approaches to significant things and places in the past and, indeed, in the present, including the ability to step outside of colonial systems and to incorporate traditionally subordinated histories.

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Books received

This list includes all books received between 1 July 2022 and 31 August 2022. Those featuring at the beginning of New Book Chronicle, however, have not been duplicated in this list. The listing of a book in this chronicle does not preclude its subsequent review in *Antiquity*.

Americas

Lisa M. Johnson & Rosemary A. Joyce (ed.). *Materializing ritual practices*. 2022. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-64642-238-8 hardback $76.

Jean T. Larmon, Lisa J. Lucero & Fred Valdez, Jr. (ed.). *Sustainability and water management in the Maya world and beyond*. 2022. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-64642-231-9 hardback $67.

Anatolia, Levant and the Middle East

Achim Lichtenberger & Rubina Raja (ed.). *Architectural elements, wall paintings, and mosaics: final publications from the Danish-German Jerash Northwest Quarter Project IV* (Jerash Papers 9). 2022. Turnhout: Brepols; 978-2-503-59666-2 paperback €150.

Julie Scott-Jackson. *Qatar: evidence of the Palaeolithic earliest people revealed*. 2022. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-051-7 eBook Open Access.

Cisca Spencer. *Shifting horizons: observations from a ride through the Syrian desert and Asia Minor. A translation of Johannes Elith Østrup's 'Skiftende horizonter'*. 2022. Turnhout: Brepols; 978-2-503-59682-2 paperback €90.

Byzantine, early medieval and medieval

Stepan Stepanenko (ed.). *A Viking century: Chernihiv area from 900 to 1000 AD*. 2022. Paris: ACHCByz; 978-2-916716-88-6 hardback €57.

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European pre- and protohistory

Kristen A. Carlson & Leland C. Bement (ed.). *Diversity in open-air site structure across the Pleistocene/Holocene boundary*. 2022. Boulder: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-64642-225-8 hardback $66.

Thomas Cirotteau, Jennifer Kerner & Eric Pincas. *Lady Sapiens: breaking stereotypes about prehistoric women*. 2022. London: Hero; 978-1-915054-78-4 paperback £12.99.

Elle Clifford & Paul Bahn. *Everyday life in the Ice Age: a new study of our ancestors*. 2022. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-258-0 paperback £24.99.

Heritage, conservation and museums

Michael Chiago Sr. & Amadeo M. Rea. *Michael Chiago: O'odham lifeways through art*. 2022. Tucson: University of Arizona Press; 978-0-8165-4475-2 paperback $24.95.

Paul Everill & Karen Burnell (ed.). *Archaeology, heritage, and wellbeing: authentic, powerful, and therapeutic engagement with the past*. 2022. London: Routledge; 978-1-03-202165-2 hardback $128.

Lynne Goldstein & Ethan Watrall (ed.). *Digital heritage and archaeology in practice: presentation, teaching, and engagement*. 2022. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6931-9 hardback $90.

Ethan Watrell & Lynne Goldstein. *Digital heritage and archaeology in practice: data, ethics, and professionalism*. 2022. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6930-2 hardback $90.

Mediterranean archaeology

Natilie Abell. *Ayia Irini: Area B* (Keos XII: results of excavations conducted by the University of Cincinnati under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens). 2022. Columbus: Lockwood Press; 978-1-948488-57-0 hardback $99.50

Stephanie Aulsebrook, Katarzyna Żebrowska, Agata Ulanowska & Kazimierz Lewartowski (ed.). *Sympozjum Egejskie: papers in Aegean archaeology 3*. 2022. Turnhout: Brepols; 978-2-503-59991-5 paperback €50.

Andrea Bellotti, Luca Luppino, Maria Messineo & Mickey Scarcella (ed.). *Spring archaeology: Atti del Convegno, Siena, 15–17 maggio 2020*. 2022. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-001-2 eBook Open Access.

Other

Brenna Hassett. *Growing up human: the evolution of childhood*. 2022. London: Bloomsbury; 978-1-4729-7575-1 hardback £17.99.

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