

Pacing out the past: recent archaeological approaches to mobility

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]bref[BARNARD, HANS & WILLEKE WENDRICH (eds). *The archaeology of mobility: Old World and New World nomadism*. xi, 603 pp., maps, figs, tables, illus., bibliogr. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, Univ. of California, 2008. £83.50 (cloth)

LEARY, JIM (ed.). *Past mobilities: archaeological approaches to movement and mobility*. xiv, 204 pp., maps, tables, figs, illus., bibliogr. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014. £110.00 (cloth)

]rp[Academic interest in human mobility appears to go through cyclical phases and the last decade seems to have seen an ‘upward cycle’, with several authors paying attention to movement, mobility, and migration from archaeological and anthropological perspectives (Cummings and Johnston 2007; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Kador 2009; Leary and Kador 2016; Preston and Schörle 2013), as well as across the social sciences more generally (Adey 2010; Hannam *et al.* 2006; Merriman 2012; Urry 2007). Published in 2008 and 2014 respectively, the two volumes reviewed here, appeared at two different points within this decade of writing on the archaeology of movement and mobility. Perhaps this could account to some extent for the considerably different approaches the volumes adopt.

In 10 chapters and 200 pages, Leary’s edited book presents recent ‘archaeological approaches to movement and mobility’, written by predominantly British (and more specifically English) - based researchers (13 of the 17 authors); with study areas primarily located in Europe (7 of the 10 case studies). The chapters in the book present a variety of methodological approaches (in the broadest sense) to studying past movements and respond to a number of overarching themes such as: ‘mobility in the landscape’, ‘mobility and the body’, ‘mobile objects, and ‘gendered mobilities’. The approaches represented include ancient DNA (Brown, chap. 8) and biomechanical (Davies *et al.*, chap. 7) analyses; landscape surveys (Aldred chap. 2); Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications (Seitsonen *et al.*, chap.

5); the development of a Motion in Place Platform (MiPP) for 'micro mobilities' (Woolford and Dunn, chap. 6); as well as the study of roads, paths, fords (Edgeworth chap. 3; Foubert and Breeze, chap. 9); water craft (Dunkley, chap. 10); and the representation of movement in Australian rock art (Frederick, chap. 4).

In contrast to Leary's relatively slim book, Barnard and Wendrich offer a 600 page, 25 chapter volume largely penned by North American authors (19 of the 28), with case studies focusing heavily on the middle East (including Egypt and Sudan; 13 out of 24). Their book is organised in two parts, with 13 chapters in the first –'The Past in the Present'-- which provide 'an overview of the state of research' on a range of areas, population groups, and/or chronological periods. There are 11 chapters in the second –'The Present and the Future' – which present a range of ethnoarchaeological and experimental approaches. Chapters in the first part thus largely review and present some of the key research issues for regionally and chronologically specific studies from across the Middle East (Betts, Bernbeck, Alizadeh, Rosen, Buccellati, Burnstein, and also Szuchman in part 2); the Americas (Browman, Milne, Holman and Lovis, Eerkens); Eurasia (Jacobson-Tepfer, Shishlina *et al.*, and Chang in part 2); and Southern Africa (A.B. Smith). The contributions in the second part predominantly focus on ethnographic observations of nomadic peoples in various parts of the world and their ethnoarchaeological applications (S.T. Smith, Frachetti, A-Magid, Saidel, Roe, Wendrich, Cribb); an experimental approach to pottery production (Barnard); and agent-based computer modelling (ABM) applications to 'capture the dynamics of pastoral nomad-sedentary agriculturalist trade and conflict' (Kuznar and Sedlmeyer).

Both volumes have great chronological breadth, ranging from the Upper Palaeolithic (Davies *et al.* in Leary) and the Pre-pottery Neolithic (Betts in Barnard and Wendrich) to the present. However, despite contemporary examples, it is interesting that both volumes contain limited reference to discussions on current population movements and migrations. The notable

exception to this is provided by Bernbeck (in Barnard and Wendrich), who argues that ‘recent writings on diaspora, transnational migration and refugees’, which view movement as primarily influenced by ‘political or religious oppression and dire economic circumstances’, are a result of the ‘capitalist world system’ as well as ‘imperial forms of subjugation’, and should thus not be taken as ‘the natural state of being’ (p. 66).

As is apparent from the dissimilarities outlined above, including the contributors’ geographical backgrounds and predominant areas of interest, along with the books’ divergent presentation and lengths, these two volumes differ in significant ways. In fact, apart from having both ‘archaeology’ and ‘mobility’ in their titles, they share rather limited common ground and advocate very different approaches to the study of mobility.

For example, Barnard and Wendrich set out their challenge as ‘using specific and well defined methods, which take into account the low density of artefacts and concentrate on regional studies’; this way, they claim, ‘it is eminently possible to come to a better understanding of mobile people in archaeological contexts’ (p. 5). Leary, similarly calls for ‘a distinctive archaeological approach to mobility’; however in contrast to Barnard and Wendrich, he suggests that this ‘entails privileging movement over place, and explicitly accepting that movement and mobility is (*sic*) always and always has been a source of meaning and knowledge for all humans’ (p. 16). In short, Barnard and Wendrich, as well as most of the authors in that volume, sometimes implicitly and occasionally more explicitly, rely on a distinction between mobile (i.e. nomads and hunter-gatherers) and non-mobile people(s). One notable exception to this is Bernbeck’s chapter, which directly critiques the mobile–sedentary dichotomy. On the other hand, the core argument for Leary is that movement is a normal and essential state of affairs for all human populations – regardless of geography and/or chronology – and consequently he, along with the other authors in that volume, approaches mobility as a

way of interpreting the archaeological record for ‘all’ people, irrespective of the amount and frequency of their movements.

There is thus a clear difference in the outlook and epistemological frameworks involved in the overall approaches pursued to movement and mobility by the groups of authors in each volume. Leary calls for ‘an archaeology of movement rather than stasis’ (p. 16); while Barnard and Wendrich seek to define and demonstrate ‘an archaeology of mobility’ (p. 5). This might appear to be a fine distinction. However, it is an important one, as the former seeks to engage in specific accounts ‘about the movement and flows of people, ideas, objects, and information from place to place, from one person to another’ (Leary, p. 3); whereas the latter seeks to define mobility itself into ‘four basic types’ (Wendrich and Barnard, p. 5), and identify them in the archaeological record, primarily among communities that are frequently referred to as nomadic.

The diversity and variety – within the parameters outlined above – represented in both books’ chapters are impressive and provide interesting case studies that illustrate multiple ways to research past mobility. Nonetheless, each volume would have benefitted from a discursive review chapter at the end, highlighting the common ground between the various approaches and bringing the discussion back to the key issues the collection sought to address. Conversely, perhaps this absence of a discussion highlights something important in relation to contemporary approaches to the archaeology and anthropology of movement and mobility. Namely, that we are nowhere near drawing any ‘firm’ conclusion on these issues, and perhaps this would not even be desirable. We merely have a multitude of approaches and interpretative frameworks from which to choose, almost on a case-by-case basis; and it is unlikely that researchers working in different parts of the world, and within divergent epistemological milieux, will come together and agree on how to approach the study of past mobilities.

That being said, Leary represents an important contribution for students and researchers in the contemporary western European, and especially Anglophone, research tradition; while

Barnard and Wendrich do the same for scholars operating within North American approaches to Eurasia/North Africa and especially the Middle East, as well as the Americas. Therefore, for precisely these reasons, it would be eminently useful for European-based researchers interested in mobility, to engage with the approaches and case studies presented by Barnard and Wendrich and vice versa. In particular, the ethnoarchaeological perspectives advanced by some of the contributors to Barnard and Wendrich, on the one hand, and the approaches to everyday movements put forward by the authors in Leary, on the other, would appear to have a lot to offer one another. To paraphrase Leary (p. 16), European archaeologists, ignore the ethnoarchaeologies of mobility at their peril; equally North American archaeologists and anthropologists researching mobility ignore the person-centred and socially engaged narratives of past human movements offered by their western European colleagues at theirs.

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