

Heffron, Y. (2022). Allison Mickel, 2021. *Why those who shovel are silent: A history of local archaeological knowledge and labour*. Colorado: University Press of Colorado. 978-1-64642-126-8 paperback \$26.95. *Antiquity*, 1-3. doi:10.15184/aqy.2022.17

Archaeologists working in the Middle East must confront the epistemological consequences of a model often taken for granted, in which “the work of locally hired laborers is disentangled from the rest of the archaeological process” (p. 17).

"This serious issue is addressed through two case studies: the Temple of the Winged Lions (TWL) at Petra in Jordan and Çatalhöyük in Turkey. Mickel has worked at both sites as an archaeologist, and has also conducted field research, culminating in the volume under review".

She is unequivocal that it is unjust to dismiss the real or potential contributions of the very people who make excavation happen. As such, the book is as much about archaeological ethics as about knowledge production, in line with growing reflexive efforts towards decolonising archaeology by focusing on labour relations.

What makes this book powerful, engaging and readable are the two lively case studies through which Mickel highlights problems, as well as presenting solutions—being careful not to “offer critique without hope” (p. 13). Two case studies do not, however, constitute a ‘history’, as the title of the book suggests. Nor are two such exceptional examples—as Petra, and especially Çatalhöyük, undoubtedly are—necessarily representative. They must be historicised carefully in a robust and precise context.

Such a context is not established in the generalised overview in Chapter 1, in which the emergence of the modern nation states of Jordan and Turkey are referenced against the backdrop of the “Middle East [being] an arena of one bloody conflict after another during the twentieth century” (p. 23). This much-criticised trope of essentialising the region into perennial violence is not put to good historical use; more valuable would have been a discussion of how specific conflicts may have shaped the formative stages of archaeology in the two countries. The Turkish War of Independence 1919–1922, the very event that culminated in the formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, for instance, is unmentioned. Also absent is a recognition of the role of Ottoman archaeology and its agency, or indeed legacy for subsequent, *distinct* developments in modern Turkey and Jordan. Conflating individual historical processes into a singular view of the Middle East, Mickel asserts that, “*Suddenly* Jordan[ian] and Turkish archaeologists and administrators [...] were the ones making decisions about the archaeology taking place within their newly defined borders” [emphasis added] (p. 23–24). The idea of a ‘sudden’ untethering from foreign management is historically inapplicable to Turkey (Çelik 2016: 135–74) and ignores the complexities of historical continuity in Jordan (Kersel 2016: 602).

Chapter 2, in which the book moves into its strengths, is a case for site workers as skilled archaeological experts. Workers’ observations, opinions and criticisms about excavation strategies and labour management reveal how projects can habitually be managed without taking into account the views of their labour force. This chapter also demonstrates, by way of network analyses, the extent to which workers’ knowledge is aligned with that of archaeologists. While excavations at the Temple of the Winged Lions reflect rigidly hierarchical trends, Çatalhöyük is celebrated as the aspirational case, in which site workers and archaeologists occupy similar positions within the overall structure of archaeological

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knowledge. It would be fascinating to read more about the extent to which Çatalhöyük's "more inclusive, more egalitarian labor model" (p. 57) is shaped by its extraordinary resources, for instance to sustain a project team with a ratio of 444 archaeologists to 29 workers (compared to the 56 archaeologists to 48 workers at Petra's Temple of the Winged Lions).

Chapter 3 is a perceptive commentary on workers' own archaeological interpretations, speculating, for instance, on intramural burial at Neolithic Çatalhöyük, or the construction process of the Temple of the Winged Lions at Petra. The chapter culminates in a discussion on the 'Causes and Consequences of Exclusion from Interpretation', in which a common theme is identified: workers are conscious of being disconnected from the outcome of the work they perform. The "language problem" (p. 87) is mentioned more than once. Solutions from Çatalhöyük focus on increasing the amount of information and training made available to local communities. It is not considered that projects could likewise invest in archaeologists' own skills training, for instance to learn a field language, by which they can be empowered to exercise greater independence and agency in communicating with locals. It would also alleviate the informal burden on local archaeologists, who must interrupt their own professional activities, "setting aside [...] other work and responsibilities" (p. xi) to facilitate those of their foreign counterparts.

Chapter 4 introduces one of the most significant contributions of the book: the concept of 'lucrative non-knowledge'. From feigning ignorance for the sake of job security to reasserting power through limiting others' access to their own knowledge, motivations for lucrative non-knowledge are varied. In examining this variation, Mickel creates an opportunity to revisit the habitual presumption that site workers possess no archaeological expertise comparable with, or useful to, the formally trained archaeologist.

Chapter 5 comprises short summaries of how archaeological fieldwork relying on hired local labour is structured elsewhere in the world, including India, Southern Africa and Latin America. This chapter places the labour practices of excavations in the Middle East in a global context, demonstrating how much there is to learn from a comparative perspective.

Chapter 6 showcases the idea of 'Inclusive Recording' so that workers' intellectual contributions can be integrated into knowledge production, especially by means of "open-ended methodologies such as photography and video" (p. 131). The power of images is used very effectively, illustrating how workers' photos can introduce entirely new perspectives but can also produce nearly identical records to those captured by archaeologists. Importantly, Mickel states that this type of intellectual contribution should be remunerated—an appropriate note on which the 'Conclusions' comes to a close.

The book ends without a clear methodological explanation of fieldwork or data collection strategies, missing an opportunity to situate this study as a benchmark for future research taking an ethnographic approach to archaeological practices. This does detract from that fact that this is a politically relevant and thought-provoking narrative that focuses our attention on the interplay between archaeological labour management and knowledge production.

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