

*Between the Devil and the Deep:
Meeting Challenges in the Public
Interpretation of Maritime
Cultural Heritage*

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Between the Devil and the Deep: Meeting Challenges in the Public Interpretation of Maritime Cultural Heritage is a new book published by Springer. The book is a collection of papers that were presented at the 45th Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology that was held in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2012. The book is part of the “When the Land Meets the Sea” series produced by the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA) and the Society for Historical Archaeology. It contains 18 chapters and includes a foreword by the book’s editor Della A. Scott-Ireton. The book is a total of 214 pages with limited images that are printed in color.

The edited volume is built upon a theme of how archaeologists create opportunities for both public participation and interpretation of a type of resource that is often too deep under the water or sand for the average person to visit or even understand. The chapters, while not seemingly organized into specific types of resources or regions, are split into two sections. The first section is part I, which deals with challenges in public access and

engagement. The second section, part II, deals with interpretation challenges. While the editor has chosen to split the papers in this manner, it really is not noticeable to the reader, especially if the entire volume is read through in a few sittings. In addition, some of the chapters do cross over in their discussions due to the fact that all of the chapters were originally designed as papers for a symposium. The separation of overall theme is not that great. The targeted audience is advanced nonprofessional and professional archaeologists. While most of the chapters are written using a case-based approach, they are suitable as an introduction to the topic or to showcase some aspect of the work or program.

One of the most enjoyable parts of this edited work is that the original symposium presented papers from both local and international authors. This combination ensures that there is a wide variety of resources for those who are interested in this subject around the world. For example, one chapter by Massimiliano Secci, one of the strongest chapters, presents a great view into Italian archaeology and offers the reader insight into issues of cultural identity at the local vs. the larger public level. This chapter highlights the important connection that all history is local and stresses that as we interpret public history, we should not forget the need for a more inclusive approach that includes local ownership and identities. Underwater resources that may have sailed from elsewhere are also the patrimony of the community where the vessel

lies. Such associations may, as in this case, connect locals to a larger cultural identity, but may also stimulate local pride in their own resources.

Another enjoyable chapter, authored by Justin J. Bensley and Victor T. Mastone on the program for Shoreline Heritage Identification Partnership Strategy, offered an insightful approach to train and utilize volunteers to assist with the documentation of resources that frequently appear along coastal beaches. While developed and used in Massachusetts, the concept seemed a very sound and sustainable approach to documenting resources that typically only appear when the sand and tides work in conjunction to expose the limited remains of a beached historical vessel. The program ties together documentation and public stewardship of the resources while reducing costs to the state through the reduction of staffing required to document every wreck that becomes visible along the coastline. The authors conclude that such a model of public outreach and support should have application in other areas, and I would concur.

While the limits of any review prevent the complete description of each of the chapters in this format, it should be understood that while I will not discuss the other chapters in detail that they are by no means without their own merit. There is certainly value within each chapter and it will lie with each reader to select the ones that connect to them. One critique is that many of the chapters are based solely within the symposium. Some of the chapters appear to have been reworked and arguments tightened up while others remain closer to their original format. Many of the chapters are brief, a result of the seminar format and the sponsorship of the publication of the book by

the ACUA. Some of the chapters, however, have the potential to have included additional materials and additional comprehensive arguments. What makes a solid symposium presentation does not always translate into a strong chapter. For example, many of the original figures that would have accompanied the symposium papers are missing from the book. Although additional figures would have strengthened the chapters, the limited number of images may have been a decision by the publisher. The images are printed on the same stock as the text and, while some are in color, the print quality appears lower. This issue is a bit of a paradox since some of the chapters discuss the difficulty of relating submerged resources to a public that cannot physically view the wrecks because of the limitations placed on the accessibility of resources. Regardless, the dearth of photos and the reduced quality of graphics does not detract from the valuable contributions of the authors.

This publication lacks a clear introduction that explores the foundational concepts that tie the chapters together. While there is a forward, it is only a brief introduction to the chapters with mention of the associated symposium. Shared visions and concepts or a more detailed explanation of the reasoning for the development of the symposium would have been of interest to the reader. In addition, a short introduction would have allowed a clearer distinction between the two sections of the book.

Finally, the materials within the book are a great resource to those working in maritime heritage preservation. There has been active discussion within the archaeological community on civic engagement and the difficulties of public interpretation of land sites; this publication brings this con-

versation to maritime sites. There are also a few chapters that I would have loved to see expanded as the concepts and materials are of great interest. There are some drawbacks but these are minor when you consider the valuable content present in the book. Simply put, I left the book with a better

understanding of the issues and came away with pathways to solutions—this is the true strength of the book that Scott-Ireton has created for us.

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