

*Making Senses of the Past: Toward a
Sensory Archaeology*

JO DAY (EDITOR)

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5 tables. \$41.35 paper.

Jo Day presents us with a new edited volume that explores how archaeologists can expand on their understanding of the material world they study. The collection of papers that has been included in the volume strives to provide an understanding of the difficulty attached to understanding a sensory view of archaeological sites while at the same time presenting an opportunity for the authors and reader alike to better appreciate just how much our senses are an important part of the lived and material world. Day emphasizes that there have been other books that have helped to shape and define sensory studies, but this book provides readers with a view of the sensory approach and how archaeologists, coming late to the study of sensory scholarship, can utilize it to broaden their understanding of the material world they study.

Days's introduction indicates the key question readers need to consider when looking at sensory archaeology: to what extent will this form of archaeology actually affect how archaeology is practiced and performed. She points out that, when performing an excavation, it is in fact a multisensory experience and whether they realize it or not, archaeologists will need to work on making the connections between the past and present experiences, which will be very challenging. She lays out how each of the authors in their individual chapter has made strides to make these connections. Each of the chapters

provides the reader with an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zone and gain a sense of how and why an artifact can be experienced in a more nuanced and involved way that it has been in the past.

Each of the authors goes to great length in their endeavors to ask the reader to consider how sensory input plays a valuable role in the work that archaeologists conduct, whether overt or unacknowledged. Each of the chapters provides readers with a different perspective on how their senses are integral to lived experience and manages to make the reader reevaluate their understanding of how people may have used a site or artifacts that have been found on the site. The authors in this volume seek to bring a more personal experience of the subject that is being investigated by asking readers to consider it from a perspective of how the environment would have been experienced by the people who were living there.

There are examples of this in chapter 2 where William A. Allen, Gerard O'Regan, Perry Fletcher, and Roger Nogansh explore the effects of shimmering light on sites situated in Ontario, Canada, and New Zealand. The chapter explores connectivity between the natural environment and the process surrounding how indigenous people both perceive and interact within that world. It looks for the linkages between the shimmering light that can be seen at these sites and how the indigenous peoples may have chosen to create images at these sites that would benefit from the presence of the phenomenon.

Candace Weddle provides readers with the opportunity to experience the concept of blood sacrifice and the attendant sounds, smells, and taste that are part of the process. Weddle

explores how the spaces that are used for the purpose of the sacrifice help create a unique sensory impact that cannot be fully understood. Through exploring how modern ritual butchering is accomplished, she provides an opportunity to understand how modern butchering practices can provide the means to analyze and understand ancient sacrificial practices. She encourages the reader to consider the smell, sight, and sound of the act of animal sacrifice and the profound effect that it must have had on those witnessing these events.

In chapters 12 and 13 Joanne M. A. Murphy and Emerson Avery explore the sense of smell and provide the reader with varied characteristics to be considered when exploring the role of scent in understanding life and even death in antiquity. In chapter 12 Murphy discusses production and consumption of perfumes and how the process of making and consuming these products created physical and sensory indicators of one's role and place in society since the perfumes themselves would have been relegated to use by the elite of Mycenaean society. Murphy indicates that perfume provides the immediate experience of an individual's wealth and that through the simple act of inhaling the scent a connection is formed between the inhaler and the desired but unavailable indicator of affluence within the society.

In chapter 13 Avery discusses material culture and scent by asking the reader to think about the stimuli that would be present within the context of tombs, burial, and death. Through an exploration of how we use the sense of smell

and even sight in our understanding of death and the process related to burial, Avery provides the reader with a chance to experience all of the visual and olfactory stimuli that would be a prominent feature in the process and how individuals experience and participate in the process. He explores the material culture used in the traditional feasting and drinking practices that were common as well as the ritual attached to material culture.

Day and the authors in this volume present an opportunity for taking archaeological methods to a more inclusive understanding of the material world. The authors in the book make it clear that we must consider sensory input as it relates to the artifacts as well as to the lived experiences of those who used and created the artifacts that were recovered. Overall, the book does an excellent job of presenting a more innovative way for archaeologists to consider their work and the material culture recovered in the process. As Day indicates, this is a process that has been practiced by many archaeologists, but in most cases not one that has been acknowledged as important and vital to our understanding of the past. *Making Senses of the Past* is a step toward helping to educate and open doors to thought and ways of examining the past as a means to broaden our understanding of the lived world both in the past and the present.

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