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Book Review: The Archaeology of American Cemeteries and Gravemarkers, by Sherene Baugher and Richard F. Veit

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Book Reviews

Book Review Editor - Christa Beranek

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF AMERICAN CEMETERIES AND GRAVEMARKERS, by Sherene Baugher and Richard F. Veit, 2014, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 254 pages, 40 black-and-white figures, references, \$69.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Timothy B. Riordan

Over the past two decades, historical archaeologists have increasingly been drawn to the investigation of burials, cemeteries and tombstones. Much of this literature is either in CRM reports for burial excavations or in specialized journals for grave marker studies. The result is that the work is not widely known and the research remains on a basic level. This volume provides a much needed overview of these developments. It is not a comprehensive survey but rather, as the authors say, a guide to, "the world of cemetery studies in American historical archaeology" (p. 1). It is a sourcebook for the types of things that have been done and provokes thoughts about what needs to be done. For the uninformed, it provides an introduction, while more knowledgeable researchers will find it a useful reference for the rapidly expanding field.

The introductory chapter provides a brief theoretical background and outlines some of the important research topics which are explored throughout the book. Also, the authors put forth a specifically archaeological perspective and argue for treating cemeteries as whole rather than piecemeal. They point out that multiple disciplines study American cemeteries for diverse reasons and argue for a holistic, archaeological approach. In the second chapter, the ethics of burial excavation are discussed in light of two case studies. The first recounts the sad history of the plundering of Native American burials and the enactment of NAGPRA. Secondly, the controversy surrounding the African Burial Ground in New York City is discussed. The authors provide a number of case studies which reflect successful consultation with descendant communities. The authors firmly advocate for such consultation before any burial excavations take place.

While few would argue with this viewpoint these days, the thorny question of determining descendant communities is unaddressed.

It is the next three chapters that get to the heart of the archaeological perspective. Chapter 3 concerns burial excavation and begins with a brief discussion of the use of coffins and coffin hardware for analysis of burial practices. The review of burial practices begins with the work done on the 17th-century cemetery at St. Mary's City, Maryland, including three lead coffins excavated in 1992. It continues with an overview of the excavation of Historic Native American, African-American and Chinese burials. Finally, it concludes with an extensive review of excavations of 19th-century, European American cemeteries, most of which were done as CRM projects. This section begins with the recent work at Jamestown, one of the earliest cemeteries and continues up to a cemetery closed in 1962. For anyone interested in the state of burial excavations in the United States, this is a good place to start.

The next chapter discusses the archaeological analysis of Colonial grave markers and begins with the classic work of Deetz and Dethlefsen on New England tombstones. While every historical archaeologist is familiar with this research, few know of the extensive work done by historians, art historians and folklorists which challenged and expanded their conclusions. The authors review this literature as well as provide an overview of specialized studies encompassing ethnic, religious and racial differences. Finally, they discuss the materials used for grave markers in the Colonial period and point out that many early markers were made of wood and have not survived, except as archaeological features.

Chapter 5 is concerned with cemeteries as a class of archaeological sites and reviews the development of these sites through the 19th and 20th centuries. The authors trace the development of cemeteries from family burial grounds or church graveyards to rural cemeteries and finally to the lawn park type of cemetery. As they correctly point out, almost all of this research has been done by historians. Yet they

go on to demonstrate how such anthropological concepts of status, class and materialism can be read in the layout, structures and markers of these cemeteries. Part of this has to do with an explosion of new iconography in the early 19th century and attempts to use more symbolic motifs on the grave markers. During this period, iconography becomes less religious and trends toward more personal or materialistic designs. The authors also discuss the development of military cemeteries as a result of the Civil War and changes in the material and style of grave markers.

Probably the most interesting chapter from an anthropological perspective is Chapter 6 which looks at "Ethnicity, Race and Class" in American cemeteries. Here the authors review a wide range of tombstone studies relating to a multitude of ethnic and racial groups. Rather than lumping European immigrants into one category, they have separate discussions of Jewish, Italian and Romany burial traditions. Further, they distinguish Spanish Catholic traditions, dating to the Colonial period, from more contemporary Mexican American traditions. They briefly review Native American marker traditions including Aleutian and Hawaiian studies. Over all, this chapter demonstrates the wealth of anthropological data available from 19th and 20th-century American cemeteries.

The final chapter is a useful summary of what has been presented. Beyond the summary, the authors use this chapter to present what has not been done. They point out areas where more research is needed and suggest topics for new research. In addition, they comment that grave markers are only one way to memorialize the dead and point to a whole range of war and disaster related memorials that could be studied in the same way. In the same vein, they mention that with the rise of cremation, cemeteries have adapted by building columbaria to house the remains. This again is an entirely new area of study which has not been investigated. Further they summarize other on-going changes in American cemeteries and markers.

American burial traditions of all sorts have evolved over time, and this, as pointed out in the book, has archaeological implications. The one thing missing or perhaps underplayed in the volume is the growth and industrialization

of the American funeral establishment in the late 19th century. After the Civil War, the various supplies used for funerals and memorials went from craft activities to industrial products. While much of this trend is historical, it had impacts on what is found in the cemetery and in the ground.

This volume provides a very useful and long overdue introduction to the study of American burial customs from an archaeological perspective. As the authors state at the beginning, it is not comprehensive. Nor is it a how-to book for the investigation of cemeteries, burials or grave markers. But it does report on a wide variety of investigations and points to research questions currently being studied. This is and will be for a long time, a major contribution to this particular field of study.

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HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY, 1600–1850, ed. by Richard F. Veit and David Orr, 2014, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, \$54.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Lu Ann De Cunzo

This important volume is the first to survey the historical archaeology of "one of colonial America's great cultural hearths" (p. xiii), the Delaware Valley. The chapters present the diversity of archaeological research from early European exploration through the mid-19th century. The authors examine several themes in contemporary historical archaeological scholarship such as cultural interaction and exchange, public archaeology, identity and ideology, and class. Through diverse studies of sites on land and under water, sites at which people lived and those at which they worked, the authors develop arguments about the region's social and cultural diversity, religious tolerance, urban development, role in the American Revolution, and its peoples' intellectual contributions. The volume makes an important contribution to the growing scholarship in Atlantic World studies, situating the Delaware Valley in relation to the Chesapeake,