

Preface

This book had its origins in a symposium that the editors organized and chaired at the annual meetings of the Society for Historical Archaeology, in York, England, in January 2005. Our own experiences as colleagues and as collaborators on a field project in the Outer Hebrides made us aware of differing approaches to historical archaeology in the United Kingdom and the United States, even among practitioners who share theoretical perspectives. We thought it would be enlightening to invite archaeologists from both sides of the pond, as it were, to present papers dealing with issues and themes of widespread interest to historical archaeologists. We selected the following themes: landscape studies; urban archaeology; memory and memorialization; gender studies; lives of industrial workers; and archaeological biographies. We sought out a historical archaeologist from the UK and one from the US to address each issue, asking them to engage one another in “transatlantic dialogues” about how they approached interpretation of these issues in their own work. To our delight, we were able to attract to our session some of the best-known and most highly regarded historical archaeologists from either side of the Atlantic.

In this volume, we have retained the organization of the session, with paired sets of papers presented thematically. Each section contains a chapter by a US-trained historical archaeologist juxtaposed with another on the same theme by a UK-trained historical archaeologist. In most cases the authors have done their best to engage in a dialogue with their counterparts. Our transatlantic dialogues are not couched in terms of Atlantic world or Atlantic history but, as discussed in the introduction that follows, engage with various forms of interpretive theory in archaeology.

The session included more papers than appear here, either because session presenters elected not to participate in the publication project or were unable to do so. We would like to thank Julie H. Ernstein, Dan Hicks, Nigel Jeffries, and Jessica Neuwirth for their excellent contributions to the conference session, and Julia King and Ed Chaney for agreeing to prepare a paper for publication even though they did not take part in our session. Julian Thomas served as discussant for the session and we thank him for his insightful comments and skill at leading what proved to be a lively discussion. We also thank Rebecca Yamin for preparing a commentary on the volume, along with all contributors to the book and to Teresa Krauss and Katie Chabalko at Springer for their unflagging good will and profound patience.

Our goal in this book is to foster greater awareness of the strengths of interpretive historical archaeology in the UK and the United States as well as to compare and contrast differing approaches. It is our hope that the book will extend vigorous debates and productive collaborations of the sort we ourselves have found so stimulating.

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