Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe: Historical, Archaeological, and Bioarchaeological Approaches. Edited by J. López-Quiroga, M. Kazanski and V. Ivanišević. Oxford: BAR Publishing. 2017. 237pp. £45.00


Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe – Historical, Archaeological and Bioarchaeological Approaches is an interdisciplinary volume aiming to identify ‘otherness’ and various social identities in the archaeological record. The volume is part of the Archaeological Studies of Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe (400-1000 AD) series (ASLAEME for short), which aims to present open and honest archaeological research with an interdisciplinary approach. This is the fifth volume in the series, which presents the Proceedings of the International Congress held at the Casa de Velázquez in October 2013 on the subject of entangled identities. As well as being interdisciplinary, the volume boasts contributions from scholars from institutions around the world such as The University of Florida, The University of Freiburg, The Autonomous University of Madrid, as well as two contributions from The University of Sheffield and The University of York.

The short opening article is by the volume’s editors, Jorge López-Quiroga, Michel Kazanski and Vujadin Ivanišević. In Ethnicities, Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe – Views for an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda, López-Quiroga, Kazanski and Ivanišević argue the benefits of examining periods of history that experienced social discontinuity and reorganisation, such as the Late Antique and Early Medieval periods in Europe, via an interdisciplinary approach (López-Quiroga, Kazanski and Ivanišević 2017, 1). As well as noting the problems with written sources and archaeological data on their own in regards to looking at ethnicity and identity, they create a proposal for successful interdisciplinary work focusing on constructive criticism and an honest and open dialogue (Ibid, 4-5) which should be in the minds of the contributing authors of the volume.

Following López-Quiroga, Kazanski and Ivanišević’s research agenda comes The Archaeology of Identities and Alterities – Opposite Perspectives for the Early Middle Ages by Sebastian Brather. Brather’s focus is the Merovingian period and burials. Brather notes the issues with examining material culture when trying to locate otherness through the burial record, that material culture can in fact convey other social meanings such as religion, gender, age, kinship, rank, region and activities the deceased participated in during life (Brather 2017, 13-14), that need to be considered when examining grave goods. One of the main concluding remarks by Brather is that when looking at identities in the Early Medieval world, it is more beneficial to examine small regions and variations as oppose to larger ethnic groups in an attempt to highlight identity at a baser level within a smaller community. Examining large geographical areas and mapping material culture geographically is problematic as regions were socially determined in this period and the people of the time would have seen a lot more than ethnicity, relating back to the other social meanings previously mentioned (Ibid, 17).

There are several non-English language articles within this volume. Le Refus De L’Altérité Dans Le Loi Romaine Du Bréviaire D’Alaric or The Refusal of Otherness in the Roman Breviary of Alaric Act by Michel
Rouche is a short article which examines The Breviary of Alaric in regards to otherness and foreign ethnic identities, through a literary lens. *La Consecration Au Christianisme Comme Un Mécanisme D'Identité Et D'Altérité Chez Les Barbares or The Conversion of Christianity as a Mechanism of Identity and Alterity Among the Barbarians* by Bruno Dumézil discusses religious identities amongst the Barbarians of the late-Roman world. *Les Antiquités Germaniennes À L'Est Européen Au Bas-Empire Et À L'époque Des Grandes Migrations État Des Recherches or Germanic Antiquities in Eastern Europe at the Time of the Great Migration and the Lower Empire: State of the Research* by Michel Kazanski and Anna Mastykova which examines current and past archaeological research on the Germanic contact with both Central and Eastern Europe, in which material culture may lose its cultural meanings and become more symbolic of other social identities as well as trading throughout Europe (Kazanski and Mastykova 2017, 90). The final non-English language article is Archéologie Funéraire Et Ethnicité En Gaule À L'Époque Mérovingienne (Réponse a Guy Halsall) or Funerary Archaeology and Ethnicity in Gaul in the Merovingian Period (A response to Guy Halsall) by Michel Kazanski and Patrick Périn, in which the authors respond to criticism made by Guy Halsall in a previous paper. Kazanski and Périn argue predominantly against Halsall’s view that ethnicity is a social state of mind, personal to each individual; instead, they take the viewpoint that ethnicity is more static and therefore material culture can be used to map ethnic groups (Kazanski and Périn 2017, 199).

A contribution discussing otherness from a historical viewpoint is *Barbaria, Barbaricum and the Location of the Barbarus* by Michel Kulikowski. Kulikowski examines the language used in Roman documents in relation to the Barbarians and how it changes over time. A particularly interesting point Kulikowski makes is in regards to the citizen edict ‘Antonine Constitution’ by Caracalla in the third-century, in which for the first-time space and boundaries relating to the Barbarians is mentioned, Caracalla creates Roman Imperium and Barbarian Barbaricum physical spaces (Kulikowski 2017, 28) which contributes to the notion of boundaries and the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality which is frequently referenced within this volume.

Jörg Kleemann has a slightly different take on otherness and identity in his paper *Did Goths Really Come from Poland? Changing Interpretations in Changing Political Situations*. The primary focus of Kleemann’s article is on twentieth-century politics and future political issues in regards to the spaces and geographical locations associated with the Goths. As well as examining how the Gothic tribes and archaeology were treated in the early-twentieth-century, Kleemann also notes how political agendas have been placed onto archaeological funding, research, and excavations regarding the Gothic tribes in certain geographical areas, regardless of whether the Gothic tribes were actually in those areas or not (Kleemann 2017, 41-42). This particular paper is unique within this volume and stands out from the rest, not only due to being easily accessible to a non-academic audience, but it is the only one to discuss archaeology in terms of identity within a modern context, which makes it both valuable and particularly interesting in regards to how identity can be viewed.

There are two papers within this volume that observe identity through bioarchaeological methods. *Forensic Anthropology, Identification and identity – How it Can Help the Identity and Otherness Problematic* by Luis Ríos Frutos looks at both past and present human populations in terms of how forensics and bioarchaeology/anthropology can contribute to learning the life history of a person and their various identities. He notes that forensics and bioarchaeology can aid in locating victims of past and present atrocities, such as genocide by examining various characteristics of the skeletons/corpses and looking for similarities among them (Ríos Frutos 2017, 49). The second bioarchaeological contribution to this volume is by one of the editors, Jorge López-Guirroga entitled *Bones Don’t Lie – Bioarchaeological Identity and Entangled Social Identities in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe*. The aim of this paper is to highlight the ways in which science can aid our understanding of themes such as origins, migration, kinship and disease in past populations. The author carefully breaks down various scientific methods of analysis and explores their potential in regards to various identities and social themes, for example, the study of aDNA can be used to examine migration and kinship relations (López-Guirroga 2017, 55). A slight issue with this article is that while López-Guirroga provides an excellent case for the usage of more scientific analysis on human remains, he treats the scientific methods explored as if they were readily available and cost effective enough for scholars to use on the bulk of skeletal remains, which unfortunately is not the case, and a contributing reason for why this level of analysis is not more commonly seen.
Another paper within this volume that examines the Roman and Barbarian world is Tivadar Vida’s *The Many Identities of the Barbarians in the Middle Danube Region in the Early Middle Ages*. Vida’s paper discussed the material culture associated with the Barbarians of the Carpathian Basin in the fourth and fifth-centuries. As others, such as Guy Halsall (in this volume) conclude, Vida concludes that ethnicity is fluid and archaeology can only tell scholars so much, it is limited and can only share basics regarding ethnicity, especially in this period of change. Vida in particular notes that burial variation can be used to signal newcomers to an area (Vida 2017, 124), which is reflected in several other articles in this volume.

Florin Curta takes a slightly different approach to identity than previously seen in this volume, by examining material culture distribution, namely clay pans, their distribution and form in the sixth and seventh centuries in the article *Social Identity on the Platter – Clay Pans in Sixth to Seventh Century Ceramic Assemblages*. The main conclusion of this article is that the consumption of pita bread, made using clay pans, was connected to feasts and status, not everyday consumption (Curta 2017, 143), this is due to the distribution in settlements in which we find multiple examples of clay pans in one house and then none in others, indicating that it was not for everyone in the community, signalling status. Curta includes a wide range of illustrations and tables suitable for readers particularly interested in this topic.

The majority of the articles within this volume focus on early to mid-parts of the early medieval period, whereas Dawn Hadley examines the ninth century in her paper *Ethnicity on the Move – New Evidence from Viking Winter Camps*. Hadley applies a lot of background to this paper regarding previous scholarship on the Scandinavians in England during this period, which is beneficial for readers who may not be familiar with this area of research, as well as briefly discussing the wider debates surrounding the Scandinavian settlements, such as number of settlers and effects of settlement in England. The main ‘case study’ Hadley uses in this paper is the Viking winter-camp at Torksey which contained a wealth of material culture from various geographical locations (Hadley 2017, 182). The main conclusion regarding ethnicity and identity from Torksey is that even during this very early period of Scandinavian settlement, the Scandinavians were interacting with the Anglo-Saxon populations, shown by the presence of Anglo-Saxon dress accessories, mainly strap ends compared to the small amount with Scandinavian associated designs at Torksey (Ibid, 184). This article is particularly beneficial to the wider discussion and debate surrounding the Scandinavians in England, as it shows that even in the early phases of settlement, the Scandinavians were interacting with the local populations, which means the lines between ‘Scandinavian’ material culture and ‘Anglo-Saxon’ material culture becomes significantly more blurred.

Previous to this volume, Guy Halsall has frequently discussed the uses of archaeology in detecting ethnicity and identity. This volume features the paper *Otherness and Identity in the Merovingian Cemetery* in which Halsall attempts to highlight that *otherness* is not detectable archaeologically in cemetery evidence from Northern Gaul and there is a distinct difference between *otherness* and identity. Halsall also raises the issue of gender identities in cemetery contexts during this period and especially notes individuals that have had osteological sexing methods applied to their skeletons with gendered grave good assemblages not matching biological sex (Halsall 2017, 195), which raises the question of how much emphasis was actually on gender identities in the past, objects could have been included in burials for other symbolic reasons.

The concluding article of this volume is *Gender, Kinship and Social Identity in the Funerary Dimensions of the Kingdom of the Lombards (568–774)* by Annamaria Pazienza. Pazienza examines the multiple and complex funerary identities expressed in burials in the Kingdom of the Lombards in the sixth to seventh-centuries. Pazienza notes that up until the eighth-century specified rules relating to burial customs did not exist, hence the wide range of burial types in this region and period (Pazienza 2017, 214). Although the burials she discusses are greatly varied, Pazienza does note some common occurrences, such as burials in open spaces or close to ancient buildings/monuments (Ibid, 215) and that although there is a great deal of variation, multiple cemeteries show age and gender organisation which clearly shows a distinction, as well as special treatment of young individuals showing a difference in how the community viewed them in death (Ibid, 218).

Overall, *Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe – Historical, Archaeological and Bioarchaeological Approaches* is a significant volume showing the importance and possible usages of an interdisciplinary approach towards the study of *otherness* and various social identities. Within this volume, we see historical approaches, examining how
language has been used to create an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality, we have examinations of material culture and its potential for showing scholars various identities, such as elitism, as well as contributions noting how biological methods may aid the study further. There are a wide range of views portrayed in this volume, with some scholars arguing that otherness and identity is easily observed through archaeological material, while others argue against this notion. There is a vast range of material examined in this volume; however, it is clearly put across and the majority of the articles are very readable by a non-academic audience. One small criticism is the range of periods examined in this volume, there is a heavy focus on otherness in the Roman Empire, it would have been beneficial to have seen a little more variety. Moreover, this volume particularly highlights the importance of archaeologists working with other academics from different backgrounds, such as, historians, as their contribution to this body of knowledge is great. By scholars aiding each other and sharing ideas in the open and honest way that López-Quiroga, Kazanski and Ivanišević’s research agenda proposes at the start of this volume (López-Quiroga, Kazanski and Ivanišević’s 2017), they can use each-others knowledge to build a significantly clearer picture of the identities people in the Early Medieval period held.

-Bethany H. Hardcastle