

Introduction

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This volume takes as its inspiration the pioneering research and career of Professor Penelope M. Allison, or Pim to those who know her. It is offered as a gift and tribute on the occasion of her retirement from the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester.

An issue that we as editors faced – and as far as issues go, it is certainly a good one to have – is that Pim’s research spans so many time periods, locations, and methodologies, that there were many directions in which to go for a volume theme. As described in the Preface, from the use of domestic space in Pompeii, to gender and identity on Roman military sites in Germany, ceramic remains and social interaction in the nineteenth to twentieth-century Australian outback, and even the creation of artificial intelligence tools to record remains, Pim’s research has demonstrated that she has had no fear in traversing new ground, or in re-treading areas previously explored, armed with new theories and methods to challenge our understanding of the past. While her professional specialities can perhaps be categorised as initially household archaeology and later as military archaeology, it’s very clear that, when considered holistically, the focus of her work has always been on how archaeological finds were used. What unites these various themes are her innovative approaches to interrogating social practices related to which things were used in the past, how they were used, and why.

It seemed necessary, almost unavoidable, that a *Festschrift* for Pim would have to be useful. Rather than a collection of disparate papers covering a myriad of topics, we aimed for a book that Pim might be interested to read even if this were not a celebratory publication in her honour. And so, we sent out the call for papers with the aim of celebrating her innovative and agenda-setting work revolving around consumption-oriented analyses.

Consumption, as a social process, seems to permeate all areas of modern life. Whilst it can be easy to conflate this term with ‘consumerism’, wherein consumption equates to our very role and purpose in the world, consumption in its simplest sense encompasses the process of using goods and services. And although the words ‘consumption’ and ‘consumer culture’ might today evoke a sense of the ethical challenges of mass-consumption, inequality, and questions of sustainability, these are only a few of the ways in which consumption can impact society. Consumption as a social process may represent practices in which the use of goods and services can constitute a form of social interaction, since no person or thing exists in isolation but rather as part of a wider human-thing network. Historians and archaeologists have more recently emphasised the value of ‘new materialism’, the

recognition that material culture has an active role in social practice. Consumption, in this sense, is seen as part of a wider network of interconnected processes within which, ‘Humans make things and things by humans make people’ (Hodder and Lucas 2017, 136). If we accept this premise, then taking an artefact-based approach to social practice can yield new insights into the ways people throughout time have created, affirmed, reaffirmed, negotiated, and reflected their identities. Within this, it is vital to interrogate how people have consumed goods and services. Potentially, in taking a consumption-oriented approach to the study of societies in the past, patterns identifiable in the archaeological record may even shed light on modern, related social practices, and have some potential wisdom with which to approach our collective present and future.

For a long time, consumption was considered to be beyond the purview of archaeology (it does not have an index entry in Trigger’s 2006 edition of *A History of Archaeological Thought*). Identifying past social practices behind archaeological artefacts was often considered messy, if not largely irrecoverable. A slightly less forgiving reading of the history of the discipline might be that these were the reasons given to disregard consumption in favour of ‘grandier’ subjects, more appealing to traditionally dominant capitalist or imperialist concerns, such as production or economics (each of which *does* have an entry in Trigger’s index). Of course, as it turns out, none of these things would exist without consumption and so it makes little sense to consider these detached from that wider theme.

In this volume, contributing authors have taken critical approaches to the ways we analyse consumption in the archaeological record, interrogating the theories and methods by which archaeologists perform their analyses. Each paper also presents new evidence for social practices and patterns of consumption in various places and times, illuminating new details and nuance to global social history.

Themes of the Volume

It is interesting, though not wholly unexpected, that with a relatively open brief, the contributions to this volume cluster around a few themes that coincide with major threads across Pim’s own work (see Preface). The broad themes of revisiting or synthesising extant datasets, employing (new) technology in innovative, targeted ways, and more generally looking at long-standing problems with fresh eyes run through this *Festschrift* and tie it together.

This volume coincides with an increasing appreciation of the 'Big Data' challenge in archaeology. There is a growing awareness that the sheer abundance of data needs to be reckoned with in its own right. Archaeological data are always increasing with material from more recent developer-led excavations adding to that from academic investigations, finds by members of the public under schemes like the PAS in the UK or PAN in the Netherlands, and legacy excavations as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These growing datasets are sparking debates around related challenges such as associated costs, required storage, and potential de-accessioning of material. Furthermore, the task of keeping abreast of the material available for even a specific region and time period is becoming increasingly challenging. For many scholars, though, these big data represent an abundance of riches for tracing large-scale, detailed patterns of consumption. If the hurdles of collating and synthesising these data can be cleared, then the scope or detail of archaeological research can be expanded, perhaps even leading to whole new areas of research, hitherto unattainable.

In his chapter, Cooper does just this, with a quantitative analysis of Roman pottery assemblages in Leicestershire and Rutland, bringing together material from local excavations carried out over more than thirty years and across nearly fifty sites. In carefully comparing the relative proportions of different wares, their functions, and provenances at different types of sites and across time, his chapter offers new insights into rural patterns of consumption and demonstrates the strengths and challenges of taking such a large-scale synthetic approach to legacy collections.

Selheimer also turns to existing data, but in his case, data which were created much longer ago. Returning to the original excavation reports of *tabernae* in Pompeii and re-analysing them, Selheimer aims to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of these varied features of the Pompeian urban landscape. The process of attributing a function to a structure is challenging, due in part to the site's excavation history and early record-keeping, but by combining finds and decorations with the structural evidence, Selheimer is able to offer a variety of suggestions for the (multiple) functions of these roadside buildings.

Nevett and Ault consider archaeological data (both legacy and newly generated material) in the context of the demands that modern questions put on our data in order to answer them. Through their examination of the burgeoning research on culturally Greek housing from around the Mediterranean, they highlight the potential of these data for answering consumption-oriented questions, but also consider the limitations. Their discussion shows that a comprehensive approach to data collection can itself open up new questions and new avenues for investigating domestic activities in ancient houses.

More sophisticated use of technological applications plays a major role in both addressing the Big Data challenge and in generating data in the first place. Advances in technology have greatly expanded the range of techniques at archaeologists' disposals for answering consumption-oriented questions. New recording techniques for newly recovered materials, such as residue, isotope, or (micro-) wear analytical methods can unlock new information from material that has been previously intensely studied by more traditional methods. Such techniques generate new kinds of information, but also necessitate gathering even more samples or materials, expanding existing datasets even more. Thankfully, technological advances have also assisted in the organisation and visualisation of existing and growing datasets. For example, digital databases in, crucially, accessible and interoperable formats, make collating and synthesising data a much more realistic endeavour. Several contributions in this volume illustrate the role of technological advances in investigating past consumption.

In her paper, Walas examines the distribution of finds at the fort and annexe at Elginhaugh in Scotland, shining a light on production and consumption, particularly food consumption, and related social stratification at this early imperial cavalry base. Through this case study, she demonstrates how detailed archaeological recording, facilitated by what was innovative use (at the time of the site's excavation) of a total station and the recording of high precision stratigraphic information, permits more detailed reconstructions of past life. She further considers the methodological advantages and limitations of studying destruction deposits for the use-lives of pottery and small finds.

The benefits of revisiting old material armed with new technology, in order to try to answer consumption-oriented questions, is perfectly illustrated by Pegurri. Her paper sheds light on an age-old archaeological question, the relationship between form and function. She re-examines a collection of late antique common wares from domestic contexts on Rome's Palatine Hill using residue analysis to establish possible use or use-alteration. The results of her scientific analysis, not previously applied to this material, which had long been assumed to be soup tureens due to their size and shape, prove that they actually had very different uses in the late antique city.

A final theme in this volume is a simple, but incredibly important, one: that embracing new problems as well as new approaches can yield new, and often unexpected, insights. For those who have long worked on a particular subject or group of materials, taking a step back and tackling other, unfamiliar areas outside their specialism may result in new insights previously unconsidered, or even unavailable, to researchers in those fields. Similarly, approaching familiar materials and questions from different angles can sometimes lead to a completely new perspective. Applying fresh eyes, fresh methodologies, and theoretical lenses can all prove invaluable approaches

for illuminating details about past social practices from archaeological data, as several chapters in this volume demonstrate.

Cremin has taken the ‘looking where others have not yet done so’ approach. She brings a *longue durée* view to ceramics, considering this class of finds across time and space, using export ceramics as a basis for examining consumption throughout interlinked world systems. In her paper, the lines which are traditionally drawn between production and consumption are blurred, in case study analyses of trade networks for Roman-period ‘Rouletted ware’ across the Maritime Silk Road, for medieval porcelain between China and broader southeast Asia, and for mass-produced English tablewares exported to Britain’s Australasian colonies. Her research demonstrates how identifiable patterns of consumption may yield insights into associated shared values, including the desire to affirm a sense of ‘belonging’ to a world wider than one’s original or immediate surroundings.

It stands to reason that ideas around consumption should not only be applied to artefacts’ distributions and uses, but also to their formal and iconographic elements. Often form and function are considered as a binary pair, where one follows another, with decoration a secondary element/concern; however, increasingly there is an appreciation that form and style in themselves serve an important function, whether that be in signalling insider/outsider status, or in the very formation, performance, and negotiation of identity. Montoya González, particularly through the use of a ‘Glocalisation’ (Roudometof 2016) framework, illustrates how a particularly iconographic scheme was consumed to create and affirm status and identity in fourth-century CE Iberia. His iconographic study utilises a series of mosaics depicting the myth of Orpheus, found in villa contexts, to consider issues such as identity on display and conspicuous consumption of imagery in the provincial landscape, offering a model for considering the representational dimensions of material culture, pushing beyond more simplistic conceptualisations of identities and their expression.

Apart from identifying instances of conscious self-representation in the past, archaeologists also use material culture to represent, or recognise, certain social groups in the archaeological record. Here, the discipline has moved away from uncritically (and problematically) equating find types with people. At the same time, there remains a recognition that patterns of finds distributions do suggest certain trends and associations with certain groups of people. Navigating this tension remains one of the biggest challenges of archaeological study of social spaces. On the small scale of individual barracks from the Roman fort of Vindolanda, Birley conjures a convincing picture of military life of diverse occupant communities, across time, which shows that daily life in the fort was much more varied than ‘just a man’s world’. The act of seeing the women and children who are represented in

the data opens up a much wider, animate view on past life.

In her chapter, Hernández embraces new theoretical approaches to examining social spaces. By applying a phenomenological and sensory lens to house-baths in the Bay of Naples area, including their multisensory physical aspects and their locations within their respective houses, Hernández teases out possibilities of how these structures impacted social use of space. She considers how the curation of these domestic spaces in the past for both resident and non-resident consumption effectively established and affirmed insider/outsider identities in these dwellings.

Structure

The chapters begin with a more exhaustive overview of the major theoretical strands used over time which relate to consumption in archaeology and wider historical studies. Ray provides a useful starting point for critically thinking about consumption, and the ways in which various theories might impact our understanding of the past as it was lived. While pointing out the pitfalls of transposing modern terminology onto ‘the past’ – famously a different country where they do things differently – Ray outlines the origins of theoretical frameworks popular in archaeological study, from economics to anthropology, and points the way forward to a theoretically-grounded approach to new consumption-oriented archaeological analyses.

The other chapters provide a series of case studies which are organised roughly geographically, sweeping across the world as Pim’s work has done. Chapter 2 (Cooper) takes us to the East Midlands of the United Kingdom, specifically the area of Leicestershire and Rutland, for an examination of the rural Roman pottery assemblage. Then, staying in Roman Britain but turning to military installations in the north, Chapters 3 (Birley) and 4 (Walas) present more detailed understanding of life as it was lived in these locations. In Chapter 5, Cremin takes us halfway across the world, from the Australian Outback to East and Southeast Asia, touching on the globe-spanning networks of exchange that objects and humans are entangled in. Chapters 6 through 8 focus on Mediterranean contexts, spanning the region from Iberia to Greece, with Rome in the middle. They also neatly highlight important aspects of household archaeology: the house and its architectural decoration (Montoya González), the interaction of the house with the artefacts within it (Nevett and Ault), and household objects themselves, such as ceramic remains (Pegurri). The final two chapters bring us back to Pim’s first major research location: Pompeii. Here, Selheimer and Hernández focus on the use of space across the town of Pompeii (Selheimer) and within the Pompeian housescape (Hernández). Ending the volume on this iconic site also hopefully emphasises how far consumption-oriented approaches have come, and how much potential still exists through the use of such innovative approaches as employed in the volume’s papers.

Conclusion

This volume represents a collaborative effort between established academics, early career researchers, commercial archaeologists, and independent scholars based across three different continents, and aims to show the variety of approaches that can be brought to bear on the archaeological study of consumption. As such, we hope that it may serve as a guide to the potential of studying the past through the lens of consumption to illuminate the details of social history.

References

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