



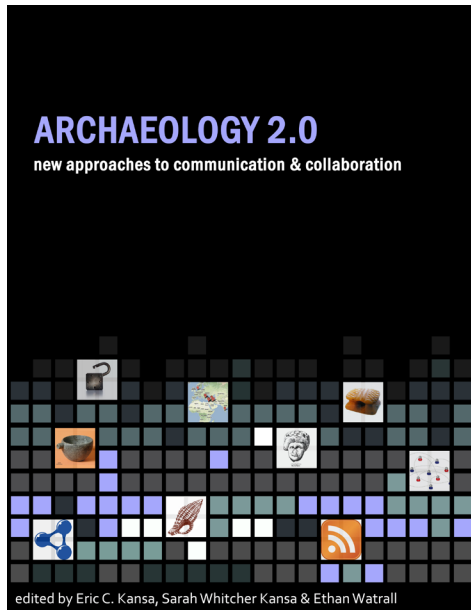
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REVIEWS



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Archaeology 2.0 New approaches to Communication & Collaboration

[Ed. by Eric C. Kansa, Sarah W. Kansa
and Ethan Watrall]

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This book, edited by Eric C. Kansa, Sarah W. Kansa and Ethan Watrall, is the outcome of a session held at the 2008 meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) in Vancouver, British Columbia. The majority of the chapters in this volume are based on presentations given during that session. However, in order to keep up with the fast pace of technological change, all contributors updated their chapters in 2010, to make information current. Therefore, given the speed of changes in IT, it could be argued that this is a reasonably current book.

In general, this book explores how Web 2.0 can transform archeological practice and how archaeologists, dealing with very specific types of data, can better understand the possibilities and limitations of the Web.

The editors define this volume as experimental, being the first volume published by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press in their new Cotsen Digital Archaeology (CDA) series, which uses the University of California's eScholarship framework for digital publishing.

The structure of the book is based on four sections in which the authors approach to the fundamentals of the relationship between Archaeology and the Web:

The first section discusses the requirements, in terms of data, that Archaeology presents, and the problems associated with archaeological data and search; key problems, such as archaeological information sharing or information overload. Standard keyword search systems often retrieve too much irrelevant information or fail to deliver relevant information, making searches using keywords useless. At this point, the authors discuss the possibilities of archaeological information management, and how techniques in natural language processing (NLP) promise to enhance the value of archaeological literature.

Section 2 reviews the theoretical and technical context of Archaeology on the Web. The majority of digital material generated by archaeological activity is geographically distributed, incomplete, inconsistent, and often hard to access. The resulting complexity presents a whole new set of problems for Archaeology. In chapter 3, the author divides the process of using archaeological data into collection and harvesting; analysis, integration and interpretation; and social research. He explores various technologies and methodologies, commonly associated with both Web 2.0 and infrastructure. In particular, he sees folksonomy as a way to supplement and enhance traditional taxonomies.

Section 3 addresses the problem of geographically remote interdisciplinary teams, providing environment proposals for collaboration and knowledge management, such as VERA (Virtual Environment for Research in Archaeology), enabling professionals to work collaboratively.

Section 4 examines the current conception of the Web, for work dissemination and publication, emphasizing that a Web publication must be considered as a real publication. Other critical issues in the profession, such as Open Access for archaeological literature and the archaeological data-sharing are also analyzed.

The book is, in essence, a non-exhaustive revision of the relationship between Archeology and the Web, current problems, working models, experiences and possibilities for the future in terms of methodologies and tools. A guide for professionals involved in IT-related projects.

The book focuses on the Web as a tool for collaboration and dissemination of research. The subtitle itself describes the issue very clearly: *New approaches to Communication & Collaboration*.

In my opinion, I would appreciate a deeper approach to issues related to the archaeological record. Usually, technology-based approaches tend to focus on interpretation and dissemination, bypassing the archaeological record, which is the generator of huge primary mass of data.

However, what is interesting (keep in mind the year of publication; 2008), is the attention given by the book to applications and services like Flickr, Twitter, SlideShare, etc., which were not as widespread at the time of publication as they are nowadays.

In general, the authors are very interested in catalogs and repositories, which allow the publication of primary data from excavations, and strongly focused on the dissemination of archaeological information in academic environments.

Despite the large number of links provided (showing the 'public' character of the projects), we miss more concrete and applicable examples. Technologies are tools and should always be applicable. Certainly, the book itself is defined as an 'approachment', so we should not expect a high level of detail.

Especially interesting for us are some cases studies, such as the Goseck project. It is an integration of a traditional resource for data (forms) and multimedia registration, so that the user can participate in the archaeological process. The user can also learn about the daily work of archaeologists and see the first results of the excavation on the website. Communicating archaeology with interactive websites and live webcams can help us make archaeology understandable and interesting to the public.

The development of the Integrated Archaeological Database (IADB) is another remarkable example. This project began at the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust in the 1990s and has continued in recent years at the York Archaeological Trust. The original concept of the IADB was to make digital versions of excavation records available as an easily accessible integrated resource for use in post-excavation analysis. Initially, the IADB dealt only with simple artifact records and stratigraphic unit or context records. Over time, the scope of the IADB has widened to include other digital resources, including plans,

photographs and stratigraphy diagrams. Technically, the IADB began as a desktop database and has developed into a Web-based user application.

Virtual communities are another focus point of the book. Bone Commons is an example of an online community created for building and sharing resources for zooarchaeology. It is an example of specialized online community, which enables us to review collections and search for animal bones. Today, these kinds of thematic communities are not widespread, despite their huge utility and potential.

Unfortunately, many of these project's websites are today closed or in hibernation, making it very difficult to know the degree of their success.

The book deals with the concept of Web 2.0, pointing out possibilities but without finding specific utilities. The fact is that Web 2.0 is based on collaboration and contents generated by the user, and this provided (don't forget, back in 2008) enormous potential.

These possibilities today are fulfilled partially and unevenly. Facebook is a great tool for promoting and blogs are being widely used, but microblogging (for instance Twitter) has not found much resonance among archaeologists yet.

Virtual communities in archeology have great potential, but today are still little explored.

Despite all this, the text offers a comprehensive overview of possibilities. Some are not yet fulfilled, others have exceeded expectations and many of the problems still remain today.

In conclusion, I personally consider this book as a good starting point to predict what the IT approach in Archaeology will be in the coming years. But read it soon because, as far as technology is concerned, it will soon become outdated.

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