

BOOK REVIEW



Behavioral Archaeology: Principles and Practice, by Michael Brian Schiffer with the assistance of Kacy L. Hollenback and contributions by Kacy L. Hollenback, James M. Skibo, and William H. Walker. 220 pages. Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2010. \$45.00 (Paper). ISBN 978-1-84553-288-8.

Reviewed by Christine R. Szuter, Arizona State University, Tempe.



B*ehavioral Archaeology* is a volume in the Equinox Handbooks in Anthropological Archaeology series edited by Thomas E. Levy. These books are written for field method classes and professionals who want to keep informed of the latest developments in archaeology. Michael Brian Schiffer meets this goal by taking some of his previously published work and using it as a basis for expanding his past ideas, providing context for his work, and demonstrating new applications of behavioral archaeology through his own research and that of others.

The book is far more than a nostalgic look at the past or a mere collection of previously published works. Schiffer contextualizes his original work within the framework of current archaeological research. These revisions and reflections make an integrated volume—a far greater experience than only reading the original works. The book provides glimpses into the forces and people of the time. J. Jefferson Reid and William Rathje were there with Schiffer as they developed the principles of behavioral archaeology and expanded the field of archaeology to cover traditional, intermediate, and industrial societies. Throughout the volume Schiffer discusses the changes in behavioral archaeology over time and stresses its flexibility to deal with current archaeological thought, methods, theory, and approaches.

The book is organized into four sections: Introduction, Inference and Formation Processes, Technology, and New Directions. Most of the chapters have been substantially rewritten for this publication with plenty of new original material. Several chapters are written by or with others—James M. Skibo, Kacy L. Hollenback, Andrea R. Miller, and William H. Walker. This addition contributes to the book's freshness and currency, which will make it a great course addition to readings on the methods, theory, and history of archaeology.

The preface and chapters in the introduction set the stage for the book by laying out the four strategies and conceptual foundations of behavioral archaeol-

ogy. In his preface, Michael Schiffer defines behavioral archaeology “as the study of relationships between people and artifacts in all times and all places” (p. ix) and being “vitaly concerned with all aspects of the materiality of human life.” He also discusses how that framework can be adapted to many different topics and approaches within the field.

An understanding of inferences and formation processes are such a core part of archaeological research and fieldwork today that the significance and contribution of Schiffer and others who emphasized them may be underestimated. In section two Schiffer describes his early research examining one of the major studies in anthropological archaeology at the time—James N. Hill’s analysis of the ceramics from Broken K Pueblo—and demonstrates that until researchers analyze how the archaeological record is formed it is impossible to make inferences about the past.

Schiffer’s passion has been technology, and in section three he elaborates on his research of ceramic surface treatments (with James M. Skibo), transistor radios, electric cars, and electric lighthouses. He takes on folk theories—where people invent explanatory factors for phenomena in modern American society—and demonstrates how behavioral theories, scientific product histories, and performance characteristics can offer a more nuanced, complex, and counterintuitive argument for product failure.

The organization of the book follows a nice progression with section four introducing the reader to the next generation of behavioral archaeologists. Contributors Kacy L. Hollenback, Andrea R. Miller, and William H. Walker along with Schiffer explore new directions in behavioral archaeology by examining ritual and religion, meaning, performance, communication, social power, and landscapes. These authors demonstrate that behavioral archaeology is a framework that can address wide-ranging topics and is not limited to technology.

Each chapter references the original publication either as a footnote on the first page of each chapter or within the text. However, this inconsistency in citation makes it difficult to follow the chronology of Schiffer’s research. It would have been extremely helpful and more interesting from a historical perspective to present this information in a consistent format.

Behavioral Archaeology demonstrates how adaptable, expansive, and open to challenges Schiffer has been throughout his career. The book is best when he offers comments, discussion, and insights into the history of the discipline. The updated bibliography adds value for the reader, shows how engaged behavioral archaeology method and theory have been in archaeological research, and is a great way to understand the development of and changes in behavioral archaeology over the decades. I recommend this book for graduate classes on method and theory and on the history of archaeology and for professionals in the field. Schiffer’s reflections are fascinating and the scope of behavioral archaeology opens up a myriad of future research possibilities.