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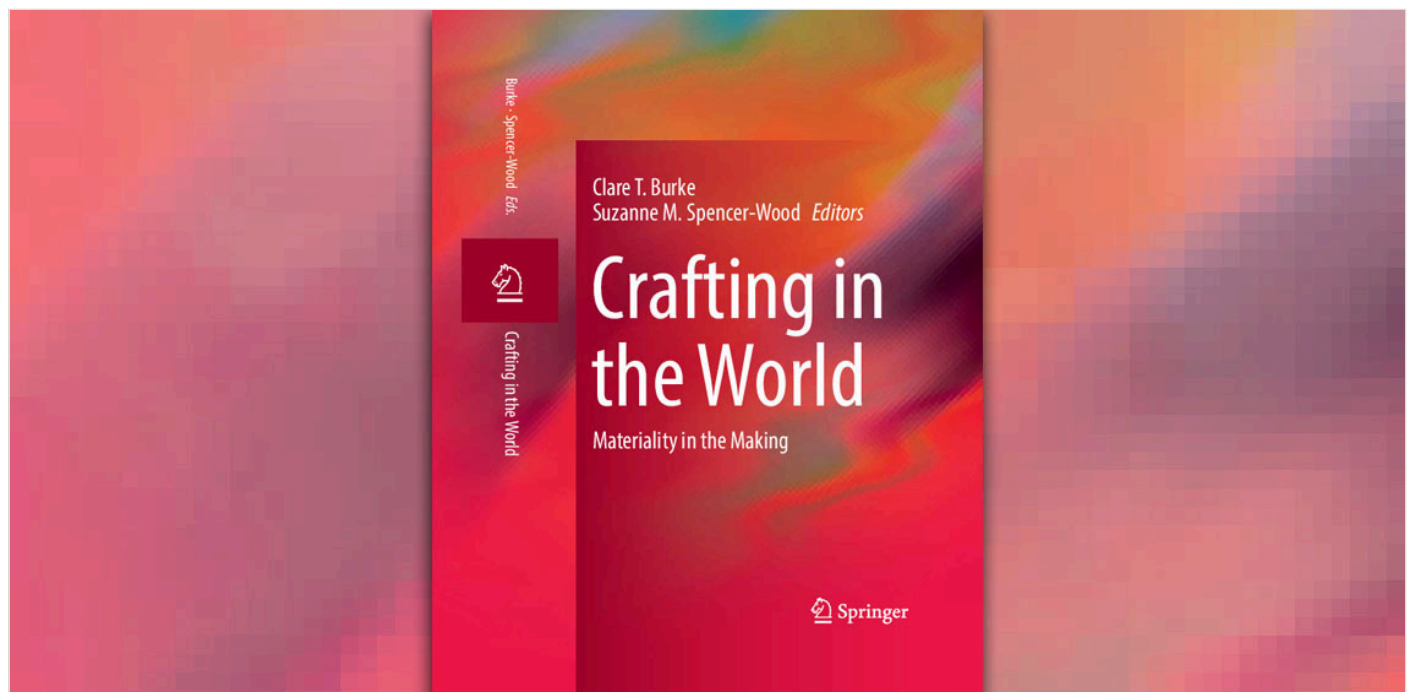
Book Review: Crafting in the World, Materiality in the Making by Burke and Spencer-Wood

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Archaeologists dream of books with comprehensive coverage that address specific gaps in knowledge and at the same time address theoretical issues and newer concerns about the nature of craft in a direct method. Editors Burke and Spencer-Wood fulfil this by discussing the world of craft.

Closing the Gap in Archaeology on Craft in the World



Using a historical method of presentation, from bronze casting; forming and finishing, sail making from raw material into a range of weaving techniques, to the more fragile crafts of embroidery, the editors develop their thesis by establishing how archaeologists, anthropologists and other social scientists approach the materiality of craft.

The editors sought to address the knowledge gap they observed concerning craft, “a model of materiality” described by Gavin Lucas in *Understanding the Archaeological Method* (2012) when they attended a conference, and “commented on the lack of cross-disciplinary research between academics of different disciplines, including crafts persons” (2). Burke and Spencer-Wood requested authors from varying nationalities to write papers on a wide range of topics and on differing sides on the origins of crafting to address this gap. Their reasoning centres around “examining the actions and processes that bring objects into being and what role the creation plays within different social groups and contexts” (1).

This volume is divided into four parts identified by subjects such as theory, materials and geographic area for ease of reference, and following each section is an extensive bibliography for further study. The four parts include: Part I: Reconstructing Ancient Practice Through Archaeology and Experiment; Part II: Reconceptualizing Crafting and Identity; Part III: Teaching, Learning and Experiencing Crafts; and Part

IV: Socio-politics and the Changing Meanings of Crafting in Modern Societies, followed by an extensive Epilogue discussing the “Future of Craft Research” (v-vi). The editors present their opening argument for the study and make their conclusions in the Epilogue with areas for future research. Each of the referencing materials is easily found in the chapter bibliographies.

Using a historical method of presentation, from bronze casting; forming and finishing, sail making from raw material into a range of weaving techniques, to the more fragile crafts of embroidery, the editors develop their thesis by establishing how archaeologists, anthropologists and other social scientists approach the materiality of craft. The contributors chosen by Burke and Spencer-Wood represent a wide range of authority, to demonstrate how “individuals in their social relations” engage in creating dynamics and a worldview (2). The editors explore how craft workers express a variety of worldviews and ask if crafting influences personal growth or if it is a combined result of the culture and individual growth through experience and habitus.

The editors explore several theories applied to crafts; Actor Network Theory (52) and Habitus and Agency (54) among others, to demonstrate the different approaches for understanding the role of crafts in society. Several views from notable archaeologists are included, including Timothy Ingold and Marranci’s tautological circuit and material world (81-83). These

approaches are ways to understanding the importance of crafts as personal growth or as part of societal change and can aid in understanding. For example, how the making of bronze tools reflects the nature of the material (worked hot bronze and marks made with tools to form shapes). The wood used in connection forms an essential part of the discussion. The editors stress the need to approach the understanding of craft from not only an archaeological or anthropological viewpoint but from the “craftsperson’s perspective” (56) for a greater understanding. The editors see this perspective as a means to a wider view of the role of crafts and societal development that is expressed differently throughout the world.

Burke and Spencer-Wood use the specific example of Islamic archaeology to explain craft production. Islamic identity is recognized as “occurring as part of the social interaction between individuals” and results in individual growth in the process (86). Moving to the present, the editors discuss new modes of craft selling such as the practices of Etsy; an online organization designed to aid craftspeople with the stated goal of “to empower people to change the way the global economy works” (125). Etsy as a platform for selling individual crafts may or may not be successful in the long view of craft influence. In a similar vein to promote knowledge, the next section centres on bringing craft into education; the Swedish Sloyd Movement to teach crafting techniques (primarily to boys); Sterling College, Vermont that utilizes teaching place based crafts; and the craft teaching Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts. Each of these began as a way to teach and preserve old craft methods developed through education in school or a simulated setting. Old Sturbridge Village began as a collection of antique tools and morphed into a recreated old village to teach crafts and has served as a model for other learning craft locations similar to other experimental archaeology museums throughout Europe.

Claire Burke is an archaeologist in ceramic material culture and brings her knowledge of *chaine operatoire* and habitus to the field of crafts. Receiving her Ph.D. from the University of Sheffield, she contributes to the sections on bronze and prehistoric ceramics. Burke is based at the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna (ix). Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood is based at Oakland University as a Professor of Anthropology and an Associate of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University (ix). Both editors bring their collective knowledge to the collection of contributors chosen for this volume, stressing the roles of specific knowledge to contribute to craft and craft theory.

In the concluding Epilogue, the editors stress the continuing cross discussions of the roles of various theories, cultural variations, and how each society expresses the role of craft, as a primary or secondary expression of creativity. I would recommend this volume as an excellent resource on the continuing debate of the role of craft. Craft and creating objects are recognized as universally oriented activities, it is through the roles attributed by differing


societies and theories that have contributed to a many-sided observation of craft and the physicality of crafting.

Book information:

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