

EDITED BY

IVAN

GASKELL

SARAH ANNE

CARTER



The Oxford Handbook of
HISTORY AND
MATERIAL CULTURE

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

HISTORY AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Edited by

IVAN GASKELL

and

SARAH ANNE CARTER

ISBN 9780199252223

Hard

Revised

Copyright

Date

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

HISTORY AND

MATERIAL

CULTURE

Edited by
IVAN GASKELL
and
SARAH ANNE CARTER

Bib. 600002601
Item..... 900008207
Barcode... 000010008891
Call no. MQ 2400
 9248
 2020
Date 30 Oct. 2563

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

© Oxford University Press 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020933538

ISBN 978-0-19-934176-4

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed by LSC Communications, United States of America

CONTENTS

*For Peter Burke and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich,
contributors in so many senses*

Introduction: Why History and Material Culture?

DAVID GARDNER AND SARAH ANNE CARTER

PART I HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND COGNITION

1. Words or Things in American History?

STEVEN CHAN, JAMES H. FENTIMAN, and LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH

2. Artifacts and Their Functions

A. W. GELFON

3. Industry, Materiality, and the Natural Order: A Jewel from the Early Modern Pearl Industry

MÓNICA DOMÍNGUEZ TORRES

4. Food and Cognition: Henry Norwood's *A Voyage to Virginia*

BERNARD L. BREMAN

5. On Pins and Needles: Straight Pins, Safety Pins, and Spectatorship

AMERICA LAMICA MURPHY

6. Mind, Time, and Material Engagement

LAWRENCE MALACHUKIN AND CHRIS GORDEN

PART II HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

7. Material Time

JONAS ROSEN

CONTENTS

List of Contributors
Acknowledgments

Introduction: Why History and Material Culture? 1
IVAN GASKELL AND SARAH ANNE CARTER

PART I HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND COGNITION

1. Words or Things in American History? 17
STEVEN CONN
2. Artifacts and Their Functions 35
A. W. EATON
3. Mastery, Artifice, and the Natural Order: A Jewel from
the Early Modern Pearl Industry 54
MÓNICA DOMÍNGUEZ TORRES
4. Food and Cognition: Henry Norwood's *A Voyage to Virginia* 73
BERNARD L. HERMAN
5. On Pins and Needles: Straight Pins, Safety Pins,
and Spectacularity 90
AMBER JAMILLA MUSSER
6. Mind, Time, and Material Engagement 105
LAMBROS MALAFOURIS AND CHRIS GOSDEN

PART II HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

7. Material Time 123
JOHN ROBB

8. Remaking the Kitchen, 1800–1850 140
J. RITCHIE GARRISON
9. Boston Electric: Science by “Mail Order” and Bricolage at Colonial Harvard 170
SARA J. SCHECHNER
10. Making Knowledge Claims in the Eighteenth-Century British Museum 200
IVAN GASKELL
11. The Ever-Changing Technology and Significance of Silk on the Silk Road 222
ZHAO FENG
12. Science, Play, and the Material Culture of Twentieth-Century American Boyhood 236
REBECCA ONION

PART III HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND THE SYMBOLIC

13. The Sensory Web of Vision: Enchantment and Agency in Religious Material Culture 255
DAVID MORGAN
14. Sensiotics, or the Study of the Senses in Material Culture and History in Africa and Beyond 275
HENRY JOHN DREWAL
15. The Numinous Body and the Symbolism of Human Remains 295
CHRISTOPHER ALLISON
16. Symbolic Things and Social Performance: Christmas Nativity Scenes in Late Nineteenth-Century Santiago de Chile 317
OLAYA SANFUENTES
17. Heritage Religion and the Mormons 337
COLLEEN McDANNELL
18. From Confiscation to Collection: The Objects of China’s Cultural Revolution 355
DENISE Y. HO

PART IV HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND SOCIAL DISTINCTION

19. Persons and Things in Marseille and Lucca, 1300–1450 379
DANIEL LORD SMAIL
20. Cloth and the Rituals of Encounter in La Florida: Weaving
and Unraveling the Code 397
LAURA JOHNSON
21. Street “Luxuries”: Food Hawking in Early Modern Rome 414
MELISSA CALARESU
22. Ebony and Ivory: Pianos, People, Property, and Freedom on
the Plantation, 1861–1870 434
DANA E. BYRD
23. The Material Culture of Furniture Production in the British
Colonies 451
EDWARD S. COOKE JR.
24. Material Culture, Museums, and the Creation of
Multiple Meanings 474
NEIL G. W. CURTIS

PART V HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND MEMORY

25. Chronology and Time: Northern European Coastal Settlements
and Societies, c. 500–1050 493
CHRISTOPHER LOVELUCK
26. Materialities in the Making of World Histories: South Asia
and the South Pacific 513
SUJIT SIVASUNDARAM
27. Mapping History in Clay and Skin: Strategies for Remembrance
among Ga’anda of Northeastern Nigeria 535
MARLA C. BERNS
28. Remember Me: Sensibility and the Sacred in Early Mormonism 558
LAUREL THATCHER ULRICH

| | |
|---|-----|
| 29. Housing History: The Colonial Revival as Consumer Culture | 578 |
| THOMAS DENENBERG | |
| 30. Collecting as Historical Practice and the Conundrum of the Unmoored Object | 593 |
| CATHERINE L. WHALEN | |
| Conclusion: The Meaning of Things | 619 |
| PETER BURKE | |
| <i>Index</i> | 635 |

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Allison is Collegiate Assistant Professor, Humanities Core: Reading Cultures at the University of Chicago.

Marla C. Berns is Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum at the University of California Los Angeles.

Peter Burke is Professor of Cultural History Emeritus at the University of Cambridge, and Life Fellow of Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge.

Dana E. Byrd is Assistant Professor of Art History at Bowdoin College.

Melissa Calaresu is Affiliated Lecturer in History at the University of Cambridge, and Neil McKendrick Lecturer in History, Director of Studies in History, and Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge.

Sarah Anne Carter is Visiting Executive Director of the Center for Design and Material Culture, and Visiting Assistant Professor in Design Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Steven Conn is W. E. Smith Professor of History at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Edward S. Cooke Jr. is Charles F. Montgomery Professor of American Decorative Arts, Professor of American Studies, and Director of the Center for the Study of American Decorative Arts and Material Culture at Yale University.

Neil G. W. Curtis is Head of Museums and Special Collections at the University of Aberdeen.

Thomas Denenberg is Director of the Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

Henry John Drewal is Evjue-Bascom Professor of African and African Diaspora Arts Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

A. W. Eaton is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

J. Ritchie Garrison is Director of the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture, and Professor of History at the University of Delaware.

Ivan Gaskell is Professor of Cultural History and Museum Studies at Bard Graduate Center, New York City.

Chris Gosden is Chair and Professor of European Archaeology at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of Keble College, University of Oxford.

Bernard L. Herman is Chair of American Studies, and George B. Tindall Professor of Southern Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Denise Y. Ho is Assistant Professor of History at Yale University.

Laura Johnson is Associate Curator at Historic New England.

Christopher Loveluck is Associate Professor and Reader in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Nottingham.

Lambros Malafouris is Johnson Research and Teaching Fellow in Creativity, Cognition and Material Culture, Keble College, University of Oxford.

Colleen McDannell is Sterling M. McMurrin Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Utah.

David Morgan is Chair and Professor of Religious Studies at Duke University.

Amber Jamilla Musser is Associate Professor of American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Rebecca Onion is the History correspondent for Slate.com and Visiting Scholar in the Department of History, Ohio University.

John Robb is Professor of European Prehistory at the University of Cambridge, and Fellow of Peterhouse, University of Cambridge.

Olaya Sanfuentes is Professor of History at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago.

Sara J. Schechner is David P. Wheatland Curator of the Harvard University Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments.

Sujit Sivasundaram is Reader in World History at the University of Cambridge, and Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge.

Daniel Lord Smail is Frank B. Baird, Jr. Professor of History at Harvard University.

Mónica Domínguez Torres is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Delaware.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich is 300th Anniversary University Professor Emerita at Harvard University.

Catherine L. Whalen is Associate Professor at Bard Graduate Center, New York City.

Zhao Feng is Executive Director of the China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE are grateful for the collaborative enthusiasm with which all the contributors to this volume have sustained this project. Thirty-one of the thirty-three authors traveled in many cases considerable distances to participate in the workshop we convened at Bard Graduate Center, New York City, in May 2014 to discuss early versions of their chapters. We are grateful to both Bard Graduate Center and to the Chipstone Foundation for the funding and institutional support that made this workshop possible. We are also grateful for the long-term support of Susan Weber and Peter Miller, respectively director and dean of Bard Graduate Center, and Jonathan Prown, executive director and chief curator of the Chipstone Foundation.

The contributors were generous enough to make their draft chapters available for critique by graduate students Anne Hilker, Cynthia Kok, and Carlin Soos in Ivan Gaskell's spring 2015 seminar at Bard Graduate Center, "History and Material Culture: New Directions." Most were also able to join the seminar by video link from locations as far apart as Hong Kong and Cambridge, England, to discuss their drafts with the seminar members. Sarah Anne Carter joined regularly by video link from Milwaukee. We wish to thank both the contributors and the students.

Our commissioning editor, Nancy Toff, has been a source of intellectual and organizational sustenance throughout, without whom we could never have dared to attempt such an undertaking. Nancy's assistants, Elda Granata, Elizabeth Vaziri, and Lena Rubin, have provided conscientious assistance throughout the editorial process. Saranya Purushothaman and Lakshmanan Sethuraman diligently led the production team, and Leslie Anglin elegantly copyedited the text.

As we developed the themes, grappled with the case studies, and corresponded with the contributors, we incurred debts to many other scholars, in addition to the contributors themselves. We wish to express our thanks to them all—too many to name—and also to members of our respective families for their patience and support.

This volume is dedicated to Peter Burke and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, both of whom are contributors. We offer this book to them in happy recognition of the many years they have been such valued colleagues and friends, setting standards of stringency and generosity in historical practice that we can only hope to emulate.

As a permanent fellow resident each summer, Ivan Gaskell wishes to acknowledge the invaluable support provided by the Lichtenberg-Kolleg (Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences) of the Georg-August University, Göttingen, and to thank its entire staff led by its director, Martin van Gelderen, managing director, Kora Baumbach, and former managing director, Dominik Hünninger (now of the University

of Hamburg). At Göttingen, he also wishes to acknowledge the aid and friendship of Marie Luisa Allemeyer, director of the Zentrale Kustodie (University Collections, Museums, and Gardens), and Ulrike Beisiegel, former president of the university.

Sarah Anne Carter is grateful to the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she has served as the curator and director of research for six years. Her Chipstone colleagues, Jonathan Prown, W. David Knox, Natalie Wright, Jackie Sarich, Elizabeth Dunn, Tina Schinabeck, and Claudia Arzeno, understood the value of this project from the start and helped to create time for it. She wishes to acknowledge with appreciation the assistance of Ann Glasscock, who recently earned her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and served as an exceptionally thorough and creative research assistant on this volume.

INTRODUCTION

Why History and Material Culture?

IVAN GASKELL AND SARAH ANNE CARTER

SINCE the nineteenth century, following a revolution initiated by German scholars, most historians have relied principally on written sources, placing special emphasis on documents. Written sources—whether manuscript, printed, or digital—are many and various. Their historical interpretation presents a considerable range of methodological challenges, and the rewards they offer the diligent historian are huge. Yet there are other traces of the past available to historians in addition to documents, printed materials, and digital files. These are the many other material things that people have selected or made and used.

The principle of employing nonwritten material things for historical purposes is of long standing in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. In Europe, this practice—called antiquarianism—was prominent from the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. In the nineteenth century, the interpretation of the past from buried and subsequently excavated physical remains emerged as the distinct discipline of archaeology. Also in the nineteenth century, some scholars developed modes of methodical attention to certain kinds of material things that many imbued with aesthetic qualities, bringing about the emergence of the discipline of art history. At much the same time, Europeans and their diaspora began to treat peoples they viewed as primitive as existing beyond human history in relatively unchanging circumstances that they thought of as part of the natural world, thereby giving rise to the discipline of anthropology.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, academic approaches to things have changed again. If antiquarianism has been revived and radically modified as material culture studies; if archaeology, art history, and anthropology have developed their own sets of specialist assumptions and practices; and if history remains preponderantly dependent on the interpretation of writings, the barriers that grew up to separate these individually broad fields of inquiry have become increasingly porous. The result is an unprecedented amount of interdisciplinary discussion.

In this increasingly interdisciplinary context, how might a concept of material culture influence historians' understanding of the past? Does the study of material culture have anything particular to offer historians that appeals to written sources, archaeological finds, artworks, or anthropological materials treated from their individual disciplinary points of view are unable to provide? If so, does an appeal to material culture work for historians only locally and in certain circumstances, or worldwide and across time?

At the outset, though, we should attempt to define material culture. We take material culture to be physical entities that resonate with communities of humans. These may be physical things that humans have found and selected, adapted, or fashioned for their use, whether physically, cognitively, or both. Material culture items may be things that humans fashion, transforming one or more physical ingredients into artifacts. Or they may be things, including living things, that humans adapt from nature, modifying them, as in the selective breeding of crops and animals. Or they may be things that humans select and adopt from nature in a physically unmodified form, incorporating them into cultural practices constituted by a consistent set of assumptions and behaviors shared by a viable human community.

Material culture items are not limited by size. A mountain imbued with communally shared associations in terms of human explanations, whether geological or mythological, is no less an item of material culture than an individual atom similarly imbued. Material culture, then, covers a huge range of things. The common thread that binds them is communal—as opposed to idiosyncratic—human engagement to the extent of transformation, whether physical or cognitive. This may be termed a maximalist definition of material culture. Most historians and others who concentrate on material culture in practice focus on those things that humans have made for their use by the physical transformation of materials.

Are material culture items necessarily exclusively physical? Given the role of human purpose in their constitution, and their place in human thought and action, all material culture items must have immaterial as well as material components. However, just as not every material thing has a place in human thought and action, so not all immaterial manifestations of human thought and action have material components in the sense in which we are using the term *material*. Although any distinction between material and immaterial properties remains to some extent fluid, our employment of the term *material culture* necessarily implies human uses of physical things, apprehended through the senses. To work with this definition is not to imply an unreflecting adherence to a simplified Lockean notion that all knowledge is derived from human sensory experience. Indeed, the Western distinction between the material and the immaterial—that which is apprehensible via the senses and that which is not—is a culturally bound concept that may not be relevant to all cultures, including various Indigenous cultures. Material culture, then, is a category of things with extremely fuzzy boundaries. It may be best understood in terms of the Wittgensteinian principle of family resemblance rather than necessary and sufficient conditions. In focusing on material culture, we are not claiming a privileged position for material culture in the pursuit of historical scholarship; but we are proposing that material culture—however hedged by caveats—is well worth

historians' attention, and it poses particular challenges to historians that documents treated as texts alone do not. Our mention here of "documents treated as texts alone" is a reminder that any document, beyond conveying a text, is also a material thing, and those of its properties that invite inspection in material terms, and that themselves can have immaterial aspects, can provide evidence to historians in addition to its textual component. This was clearly acknowledged by the historian Arlette Farge in a meditation on the character and conditions of documentary archives that is surely second to none, in which she chooses to cite not only documents in the narrow sense but other things preserved in French archives since the eighteenth century: a fragment of a shirt that a prisoner in the Bastille failed to smuggle out to his wife, and a pouch of seeds sent to the Royal Society of Medicine allegedly discharged from a woman's breasts each month.¹ The historian drawn to written documents values the archives in part because those documents do not account for the entirety of their contents, and nondocumentary materials can be especially illuminating—they can "communicate the feeling of reality better than anything else can," in Farge's words—out of all proportion to their numbers in the context of the archive.

How can historians make not merely adequate but the best use of material culture? Everything that survives from the past, however remote or recent, is a trace of that past. Often a given thing is a trace of more than one moment in that past. This is the source of its usefulness to historians who seek to make something of that past for their contemporaries in the present. That is, a material culture item can be a primary source—an admittedly problematic concept—no less than a manuscript, in printed or digital form, can. Farge is right to note that perhaps a material culture item can "communicate the feeling of reality better than anything else can," but it can do so much more when treated as evidence of past lived experiences.

One of the major inhibitions to treating material culture items as primary sources is a propensity on the part of historians familiar with relying on written materials sorted in archives and elsewhere to appeal to such things as no more than mere illustrations. To treat a material culture item as a subsidiary illustration can evoke an event or enliven a text but fails to employ it as a source of unique information. However, properly interpreted, any material culture item can be a source of information about the past. Often that information is unobtainable by other means. Indeed, the successful use of material culture in history depends on treating such sources—material things of many kinds—not as illustrations to picture already developed arguments about the past, but as key evidence. Historians who use material things as illustrations alone limit their potential as primary evidence. This practice can also suggest a familiarity with the past in this medium that is all too often shallow or even false.

Although the varied things that constitute material culture are no less rich as primary sources than are written documents, each kind—and there may be an infinite variety of things to consider—requires the application of interpretive skills appropriate to it. These skills overlap with those acquired by scholars in disciplines that may abut history but are often relatively unfamiliar to historians, including anthropology, archaeology, and art history. Creative historians can adapt and apply the same skills they honed while studying

more traditional text-based documents even as they borrow methods from these fields. When historians use material culture as primary evidence convincingly and successfully, they illuminate fruitful relationships between the practice of history and these other disciplines. They can even think through familiar historical problems in new ways.

What kinds of history do those historians who turn to material culture produce? Although they have certainly turned their attention to social elites, as have archaeologists and art historians, material culture also gives scholars access to the past of subaltern groups. By "subaltern groups" we mean groups at a disadvantage to those exercising power within a society.² This access has meant that Western historians of material culture often identified or allied with the emergence in the 1970s of nonelite social and cultural history. This history aimed to bring to light the lives of those excluded from or marginal to the dominant written record. These include, in particular, working people of all kinds (including the enslaved), ethnic minorities, women, sexual orientation minorities, children, and nonhuman animals. Initially, some historians who practiced well-established elite history in the political, economic, and intellectual realms were suspicious of the historical value of subaltern history, while some who practiced what was sometimes referred to as the "new history" in turn denigrated attention to elites and their political, economic, military, and intellectual concerns. More recently, mutual jealousy and envy have receded considerably. Many now see attention to "high" and "low" as necessarily complementary for a rounded understanding of the past. Material culture can play a transformative role in both areas. Attention to material culture can help to bring historical attention to the many considerations that link elite and subaltern concerns, whether these are matters of shared interest or of conflict.

Material culture can be open to all who interpret the past, regardless of whether their principal concerns are with subalterns or elites. Certainly, political, economic, military, and intellectual historians can make fruitful use of material culture. Indeed, historians of all kinds can acquire the capacity to be adaptable in respect of the materials they press into service and the various ways in which they are studied, while keeping distinctively historical questions ever in the forefront of their concerns. For example, in 1792, Thomas Jefferson decided to commission a great clock for his home at Monticello. In surviving letters and manuscripts, Jefferson described his plan for this object. The Janus-faced, seven-day clock would keep time both inside and outside this founding father's home. Just over a decade later, when president of the United States, Jefferson finally had the clock installed. The interior clock kept time with both hour and minute hands; a smaller clock face even ticked the passing seconds. The larger exterior face in the portico could be seen from the fields where his enslaved workers could keep track of each hour of labor. For them, no minute or second hand was deemed necessary. Those who could not see the exterior clock could hear the Chinese gong that marked the hourly passage of time on the plantation and defined the sonic limits of Jefferson's authority. As the creation of a president and statesman known for his mechanical ingenuity, this clock has an impressive paper trail in the Library of Congress. Yet, if the manuscripts and letters in the Library of Congress were to disappear and only the clock remained, it would still offer strong evidence about a specific historical world, particularly about power relations and the history of race-based slavery in the early United States. The enslaved workers in

the fields lacked the control over their time to worry over passing seconds or minutes, a concern for family and guests whose refined, structured time was punctuated by individual appointments and commitments. The hourly gong offered enslaved individuals—even those up to six miles away—a steady reminder of their position within a hierarchical structure of the plantation. Study of the physical clock makes these conclusions possible.³

Just as a careful historian would view any document of the past, she must study the clock within the context and conventions of its world, a world—early nineteenth-century Virginia—in which clocks conveyed information in specific ways and enslaved laborers comprised the primary workforce. This is how material things can aid historians: in the absence of written documents or, often most fruitfully, in conjunction with them, material things represent the experiences, choices, and creations of individuals whose lives may be unrecorded, or offer additional insights about prominent people that may not make it into the written historical record. Jefferson's clock provides additional evidence about the experience of enslaved individuals who were not permitted to leave many written traces, even though they lived in a literate society. If they appear at all, those who do not write appear solely from the viewpoint of those who do. Material culture can help to redress the balance, even at times providing evidence that unmask the assumptions and prejudices of those who rely on writing.

Although each specific case has unique characteristics, historians can press material culture into such service anywhere in the world. Material culture has not only opened vistas of the past in respect of subaltern groups at a disadvantage to those exercising power within a society, but also of communities that have been in any given place longer than those who consequently came to dominate them as wielders of imperial power or as colonizing settlers. The subaltern can include the Indigenous.⁴ Indigenous communities frequently have not used writing, or they may even have deliberately relinquished its use.⁵ In these cases, an appeal to material culture can offer historians a much richer and more balanced source base. This can be especially informative whenever and wherever a society has extended its geographical reach. Instances include, among many others, Arab expansion in West Asia and North and East Africa, Han Chinese expansion in East Asia, and European seaborne expansion in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. The study of material things allows historians to address the ongoing consequences of the textual imbalance between those who write and those who do not.

If history is to be concerned with more than a minority of societies and communities throughout the existence of humankind, historians must look beyond writing. Material culture can allow access to aspects of the lives of those many human groups that have not used or relied on writing, whether existing in literate societies or in societies dominated by oral traditions. Thankfully, the three-tier system of human distribution familiar from classical antiquity and its Western revivals—savagery, barbarism, and civilization—no longer accounts for the sophistication and dignity of all humans, regardless of their perceived social organization and culture. If there has been no appreciable evolution in human intellectual capacity since early Paleolithic times, historians should be prepared to regard all humans ever as essentially equal rather than ranked according to their adoption of certain forms of social organization and particular technological achievements.

By accepting this understanding, “pre-history” becomes a thing of the past. All peoples can have histories, their own or those produced by outsiders. They include all those who have never used writing or who have purposefully relinquished its use. The material culture of such peoples—when accessible—gives historians, who are often outsiders, entry to aspects of their pasts.

This reality raises a serious puzzle. To what extent should outsiders have entry to the concerns of subaltern and Indigenous groups in order to produce history in a manner that might be quite foreign to those groups? Many Westerners (and some others, for instance, some Japanese) have believed that there are no legitimate limits to what they might properly learn about other peoples they encounter. Yet many subaltern, especially Indigenous, communities wish to enforce strict limitations on access to knowledge about them.⁶ The exploitation by historians, as well as by anthropologists and art historians, of some types of material culture such as grave goods and other sacred things, as well human remains, can cause what the philosopher James O. Young terms *profound offence*.⁷ Historians who encounter prohibitions on access to material culture items, or limitations on their permitted uses, would do well to ponder the consequences, both moral and practical, of transgression. In these instances, communication, collaboration with, and respect for the keepers and scholars of these objects are of vital importance.

There is yet another category of material culture from which historians can learn: not those things that have survived from the past, but that are the newly created results of experiment and diligent replication. Material culture for historians is not confined to actual traces of the past, but also to understandings of the processes and craft skills that may survive into the present. This is so, in part, because historians are not concerned with trying to understand the character of particular material things for ontological or aesthetic reasons, but for their role as mediators of human behavior. There is a role for what is termed “experimental archaeology” and “re-enactment” in making history. Much can be learned from choosing, making, and using newly made material things that replicate material culture items from the past. Fashioning a hand axe by napping flint can promote at least some understanding of materials and skills, while wearing stays or corsetry recently made from old patterns with appropriate materials can aid in the acquisition of an appreciation of the contingency of bodily deportment. Many such replications and re-enactments, whether individually or communally, can cast light on human behavior in the past, in particular on the patterns of behavior they suggest. Such studies are therefore properly within the purview of history and material culture.

MATERIAL CULTURE, MATERIAL PLURALISM

Any human community from any time and from anywhere on Earth can be the subject of history through material culture. Humans at all times and in all places have certain

The Oxford Handbook of HISTORY AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Contributors

Christopher Allison, Marla C. Berns,
Peter Burke, Dana E. Byrd, Melissa Calaresu,
Sarah Anne Carter, Steven Conn, Edward S. Cooke, Jr.,
Neil G. W. Curtis, Thomas Denenberg, Henry John Drewal,
A. W. Eaton, J. Ritchie Garrison, Ivan Gaskell, Chris Gosden,
Bernard L. Herman, Denise Y. Ho, Laura Johnson,
Christopher Loveluck, Lambros Malafouris,
M. Colleen McDannell, David Morgan,
Amber Jamilla Musser, Rebecca Onion, John Robb,
Olaya Sanfuentes, Sara J. Schechner, Sujit Sivasundaram,
Daniel Lord Smail, Mónica Domínguez Torres,
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Catherine L. Whalen, Zhao Feng

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

www.oup.com

Jacket design: Linda Roppolo | Cover image: Paul Scott, *Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery, (Untitled)*, 2013. Photo by Elizabeth Miller.

ISBN 978-0-19-934176-4



9 780199 341764