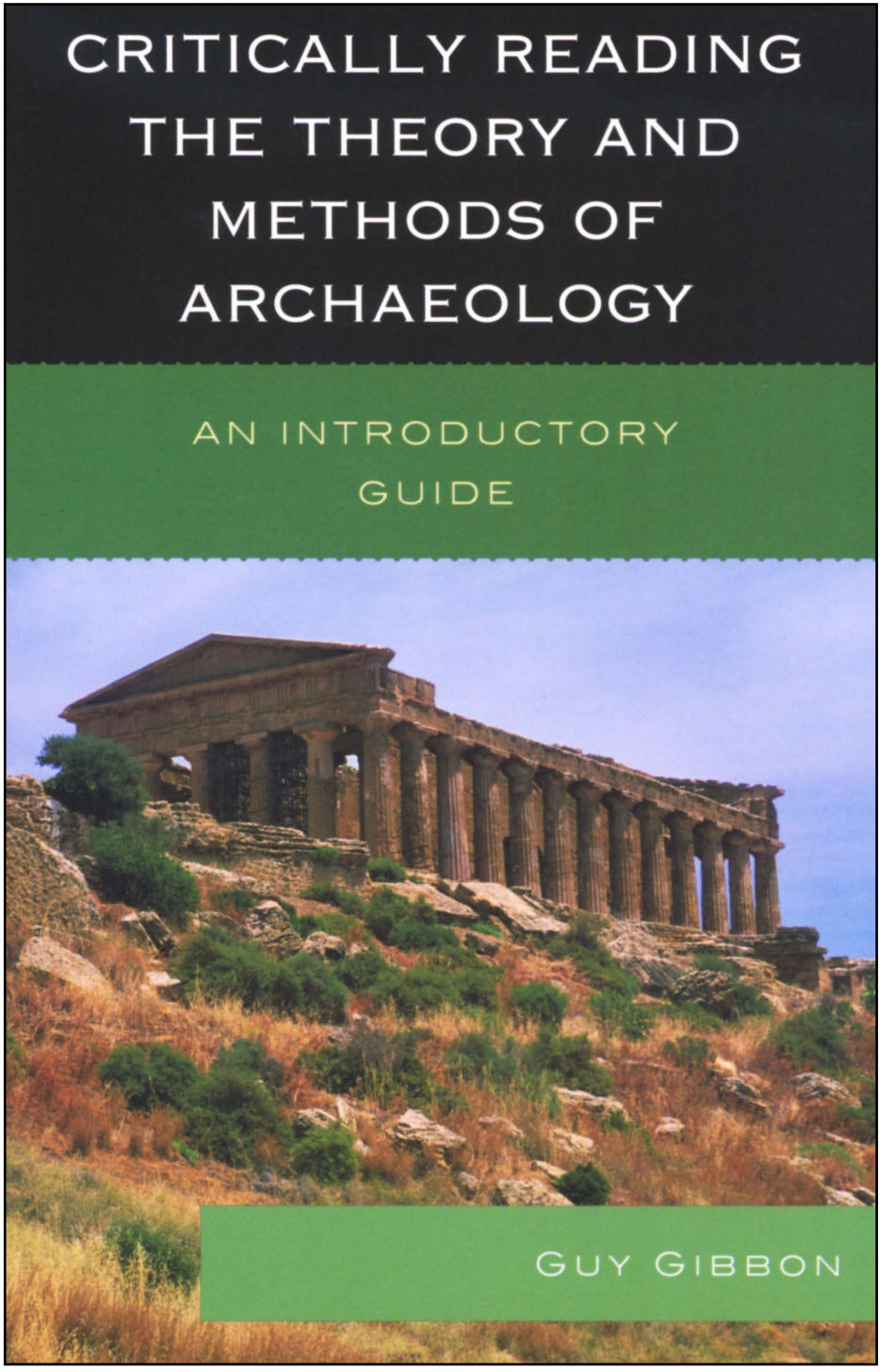

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY / ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODS

"This little book packs a punch! We have come to expect clear arguments and cogent logic from Guy Gibbon's work, but here he not only gives us the tools to evaluate the clarity, validity, and cogency of archaeological literature, but also employs them to analyze examples of potential arguments. This book should be required reading for any archaeologist. I am certain it will become a well-thumbed volume on my bookshelf."

—**Peter Peregrine**, PhD, Lawrence University

"The most invaluable lesson I learned at university was to be skeptical of what I read and to think for myself. Gibbon's stimulating book, *Critically Reading the Theory and Methods of Archaeology*, encourages readers to read critically, challenge arguments, and not accept things at face value, and it is to be applauded and welcomed for doing so. Our discipline will only progress through the rebuttal of fixed ideas, entrenched views, and erroneous dogmas, of which there are many in archaeology."

—**Paul G. Bahn**, coauthor of *Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*

"Gibbon has produced a powerful text for courses that aim to teach disciplinary writing and thinking and for courses in archaeological writing and archaeological theory. *Critically Reading the Theory and Methods of Archaeology* fosters thinking about archaeology as a holistic discipline and is a valuable resource for teaching archaeology students to read and think critically."

—**Mary C. Beaudry**, Boston University

Critically Reading the Theory and Methods of Archaeology stands out as the most thorough and practical guide to the essential critical reading and writing skills that all archaeological students, instructors, and practitioners should have. It provides priceless insight for the here and now of the theory and methods of archaeology classes and for a lifetime of reading, learning, teaching, and writing. Chapters focus on rigorous reasoning skills, types of arguments, the main research orientations in archaeology, the basic procedural framework that underlies all schools of archaeology, and issues in archaeology raised by skeptical postmodernists.

GUY GIBBON is professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of a number of books, including *Anthropological Archaeology*, *Explanation in Archaeology*, and *The Sioux*.

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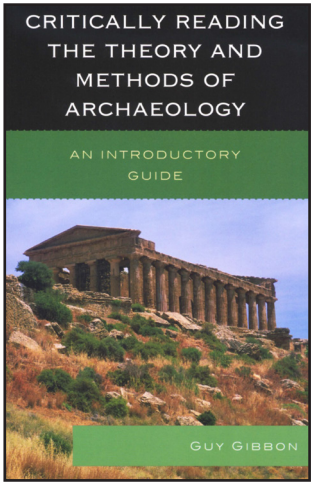

Critically Reading the Theory and Methods of Archaeology: An Introductory Guide

Guy Gibbon. 2014. AltaMira Press, viii + 245pp., 5 figures, 2 tables, endnotes, references. $95.00 (Hardback), $38.00 (Paper), $37.99 (eBook).

Reviewed by Julie Zimmermann Holt, Department of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Gibbon's main goal with this book is clearly indicated by his title: he wants readers to think critically when reading archaeological texts. He suggests that his book is appropriate for undergraduates, graduate students, nonprofessionals, and also professional archaeologists. He further suggests that students engaged in thesis writing and also professional archaeologists might find the book useful in helping them write more clearly and coherently. I think Gibbon succeeds with these goals, and I agree that both students and professionals will benefit from reading his book.

The book is divided into four parts and twenty chapters, which Gibbon says can be read in any order. Part I (Chapters 1–9), titled "*Foundations*," introduces different kinds and goals of archaeology, the research cycle, informal logic, and reading strategies. Part II (Chapters 10–13) is titled "*From Observations to Population Estimates*" and offers a very succinct crash course in statistics, or, to be more accurate, a crash course in critically reading statistics, tables, and charts. Part III (Chapters 14–17) is titled "*Interpreting the Archaeological Record*," and offers additional discussion of the research cycle, research programs in archaeology, and informal logic. Part IV (Chapters 18–20), titled "*Evaluating Interpretations of the Archaeological Record*," offers further discussion of how to evaluate archaeological conclusions and interpretations.

Gibbon's writing is refreshingly clear: he practices what he preaches! I think undergraduates will find his writing accessible, and will also appreciate the brevity of the chapters, as I did. Students today are used to sound bites, and I must admit that my own attention span is not what it used to be. Another feature of Gibbon's writing that facilitates reading is his use of endnotes rather than in-text citations. I found the notes at the end of the book interesting, but I suspect most undergraduates would skip them unless writing a paper on one of the topics Gibbon covers. Since "*Reasoning and Argumentation*" is a required course at my university, I think most of my students would find the discussions of informal logic familiar, and would probably groan at having to read chapters dedicated to rhetorical devices (Chapter 7), fallacies in reasoning (Chapter 8), etc. Nevertheless, I think they would benefit from thinking about logic and argumentation with specific reference to archaeology, and taught by an archaeologist rather than a philosophy professor. I think my students would also groan at the chapters on statistical analysis. However they would benefit from this presentation as well, most especially since they are *not* required to take a course in statistics.

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My students already groan loudly when required to read about archaeological "theory," but these are the discussions in the book that I found most thought provoking. In Chapter 1, Gibbon begins by offering a brief description and critique of different types of archaeology. Here he offers a contrast between the extremes of "flatland modernism" and "skeptical postmodernism," which he suggests are both "missteps." Gibbon cites the philosopher Ken Wilber, arguing that rather than simply study humans from the opposing stances of either "scientific materialism" or "skeptical postmodernism," archaeologists would more productively study humans from four different, complementary perspectives. These are nicely summarized in Figure 1.1, and include "exterior-individual," "exterior-collective," "interior-collective", and "interior-individual" quadrants, where *individual* refers to the individual (person, artifact, etc.) and *collective* refers to the group (society, tool kits, etc.), and *interior* is subjective (or perhaps *emic*) whereas *exterior* is objective (or perhaps *etic*). Or, to ponder these quadrants in terms more familiar to archaeologists, respectively they might roughly compare with infrastructure, structure, superstructure, and the mind of the individual. Although Gibbon argues that each of these quadrants is equally important, he also admits the difficulty for archaeologists in developing "testable knowledge about the interior thoughts of individuals and the cultural understandings they share" (p. 14).

Following Gibbon's advice to think about an author's word choice, I would note that he clearly advocates hypothesis-testing, but nowhere did I see mention of the hermeneutic circle or discussion of hermeneutics. Throughout the book, Gibbon is in fact presenting a philosophy of science as he discusses the research cycle, the nature of observation, objectivity, credibility and kinds of evidence, deductive and inductive arguments, and the like. However, while he is clearly a proponent of scientific reasoning, he also concludes that "there is no choice but to accept a skeptical postmodern position" (p. 88).

In Chapter 1, when he first discusses modernism and postmodernism, Gibbon does not use the terms "*processualism*" or "*postprocessualism*." My curiosity piqued by his avoidance of these terms, I found that the phrase "*processual archaeology*" appears in the index, but the phrase "*postprocessual archaeology*" does not. However, in the discussion of *Research Programs* in Chapter 15, Gibbon explicitly discusses both processual and postprocessual archaeologies, the former characterized as "systems-centered" archaeology and the latter offered as an example of "agency-centered research programs." In his endnotes, Gibbon argues, "Postprocessualists generally agree that the term 'postprocessual' is inadequate, for it does not describe what their program is about…. In contrast to the other research programs reviewed here, there is a very diverse array of viewpoints in agency-centered archaeology" (p. 225). The other research programs reviewed by Gibbon in Chapter 15 are "*trait-centered archaeology*" (i.e., pre-processual archaeology) and "*integral archaeology*" (i.e., post-postprocessualism, if you will). Gibbons discusses these four research programs in historical order (*trait-centered, systems-centered, agency-centered, and integral archaeology*), and he notes that each research program offers a critique of the one that came before. He states that *integral archaeology* considers "all four quadrants [exterior-individual, exterior-collective, interior-collective, and interior-individual] without privileging any one of them" (p. 157). Since he notes in Chapter 1 that each

of these four quadrants is equally important, and since *integral archaeology* is apparently the only research program that considers all four quadrants equally, we might assume that it is superior to the older research programs. However, Gibbon concludes Chapter 15 by suggesting that these successive research programs complement rather than compete with one another. He argues, "a case can be made that the emergence of the research programs reviewed in this chapter were stimulated as much if not more so by changing ideals of science than by growing maturity within the discipline" (p. 159). He somewhat cynically suggests that new research programs emerge as new scholars strive to make a name for themselves, and that newer is not necessarily better.

As I write this, my *Archaeology Method and Theory* students are struggling to write their research papers on a theoretical paradigm in archaeology. I wish I had assigned this book, even though it would make them groan (everything does). Gibbon offers an up-to-date, concise, and readable summary of archaeological theory, informal logic, statistics, and philosophy of science. Undergraduates, graduates, and professionals alike might find that this book will not only make them more critical readers of archaeology, but also better writers of archaeology. That is, Gibbon's book has the potential to make us better archaeologists.