

SAITTA, DEAN J. *The archaeology of collective action*. xx, 140 pp., maps, illus., bibliogr. Tallahassee: Univ. Press of Florida, 2007. \$24.95 (paper)

This slender volume is an interesting study concerned, as the Series Editor informs us (p. xiv), with reconstructing an aspect of the 'American experience', specifically the Colorado Coalfield strike and war of 1913-14, which included the now infamous Ludlow Massacre. Emphasis is placed upon reconstructing 'collective action' and chapter 1 sets out the theoretical framework and evaluates relevant, topical, archaeological epistemology, largely in relation to 'ownership' of the past. A critical historical archaeology is called for as a mechanism for emancipating groups for too long excluded by middle-class archaeology. This is a relevant point and Saitta is writing from a historical archaeological perspective, a disciplinary sub-area with a heightened sense of reflexivity in comparison to, for instance, prehistoric Near Eastern or African archaeology.

Chapter 2 sets out at greater length Saitta's thinking on the 'philosophical commitments' involved in such a critical archaeology. This is anchored within a self-defined 'Pragmatist' archaeological framework, the American intellectual legacy of which is admitted in relation to, for example, Peirce, Dewey, and more recently Richard Rorty. The premises of both objectivity and truth are rightly questioned and the development of a 'working-class' (p. 12) archaeology signalled. Yet here, perhaps, the privileged position of Saitta and his colleagues is all too apparent (and not fully acknowledged) in dealing with recent events, actions, and their material residues as opposed to the scraps and fragments most archaeologists have to deal with, which are further removed both chronologically and in terms of 'consciousness' than those discussed by Saitta. Hence his argument from the outset is constructed from a position of empirical strength denied the majority and allowing somewhat grander claims to be made.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the archaeology of collective action. The tenets of processual and post-processual archaeology are briefly outlined, perhaps unnecessarily, for this is material that should by now be well known to Saitta's assumed intended audience, that is, archaeologists. Agency theory is considered at some length, which is understandable in examining collective action, and some useful critical points made. Less pertinent are the

references to Hodder's work among the Baringo or Leone's on colonial Annapolis, again for the reason already cited, that this is well known. Conversely, 'a contextual theory of material culture' (p. 33) could have been more fully developed, for though we get a later reference to 'materiality' (p. 68), this area of current archaeological interest and relevance is largely neglected when it could have been profitably explored in relation to the data from Ludlow.

Chapter 4 is more successful in narrowing the focus on to historical archaeology, broadly defined, again in relation to strategies for exploring the 'archaeologies' of collective action. Chapter 5 provides a logical progression into the presentation of the empirical data, firstly historical evidence, and in Chapter 6, the archaeological data. Both chapters (and indeed the whole book) are clearly written and the data well presented, though it should be noted that some of the illustrations are a little murky and one at least, of an archaeological unit, breaks convention in lacking a scale (Fig. 6.7).

In general it is in the empirically grounded discussion that the strength of the volume lies rather than in the attempt at constructing a hermeneutic of collective action too broadly construed. For recurrently, and this is perhaps where the fault-line emerges between the grander claims and the specificities of the study, the American emphasis is apparent. This is relevant even insofar as the definition of class 'as a fluid set of processes' (p. 64) is proposed. This might be applicable in the Ludlow context (its universality even in relation elsewhere to the American 'experience' could be questioned), but is less so in other temporal and spatial contexts where issues of ascription could be much more important rather than those surrounding fluidity.

Hence chapter 7 is very successful for it concentrates upon the implications of the material considered with regard to how they resonate in public consciousness today, why the inequality of opportunity persists in America, and, briefly, how it influenced and affected Saitta himself. The success of the discussion is because it is tightly bound to the Colorado case study, whereas, in contrast, chapter 8 is less fulfilling in advancing claims which could be interpreted as too grand in their proposed potential impact. None the less, this is in part understandable for we all want our research to have 'impact', and, notwithstanding this criticism, Saitta is to be commended for providing us with an interesting study.

TIMOTHY INSOLL *University of Manchester*