

Naum, M., Linaa, J., Escribano-Ruiz, S. (eds.) (2021): *Material Exchanges in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Archaeological perspectives*, Turnhout: Brepols. <https://www.brepols.net/products/IS-9782503593999-1>

I was already curious about this book before starting to read it. As a medieval and post-medieval material culture specialist, I tend to read a lot about things (aka commodities, artefacts, objects), and it is always with curiosity that I engage in a new book about a subject that says so much to me. Being familiar with most of the authors who contributed to *Material Exchanges in Medieval and Modern Europe*, I was not disappointed. It was particularly fascinating the fact that the book's premise is movement and how artefact itinerancy can aid archaeologists in writing new narratives. By trying to discuss movement the book necessarily enhances concepts such as import, exotic, foreign, and the extraordinary, something that all the authors recognize as one of the most well-debated concepts in archaeology.

According to the editors, the idea for the book started in 2017 when during a European Archaeologists Association meeting, two of the three editors organized a session aiming to discuss the movement of European things between the 14th and the 17th centuries, especially debating places that are not usually published internationally. It would have been pleasurable to know a little more about this session in the current book. Although sometimes ideas can be born from one single sparkle moment it seems that this was not the case with this book. The idea for this publication seems to have matured over a few months and involved interesting debates that certainly discussed ideas that could not be featured in the publication.

The book puts movement as the central issue of debates and how things on movement acquire different meanings. This makes geographic relations one of the key aspects of the publication, however except for some general considerations and a map locating the places studied in the different chapters, there are no other broader geographical reflections, and these are limited to what authors explore in their work. The abovementioned map resumes Europe as a limited space, fitted in a vertical rectangle, from the Iberian Peninsula to the Balkans, where researchers can almost pinpoint the location of their studies ignoring the "interconnected nature of Europe" (a sentence which opens the introduction), made through the movement of people and things, not to mention ideologies and structural identities, or as the editors so well resume it "customs, taste, beliefs, or emotions". The book focuses on some regions of Europe however these appear almost as disconnected from each other and while for example, we read about the Basque Country and Asturias within the Iberian Peninsula or Venice in relation to Dalmatia, we are never taken to a discussion on how all these places exist at the same time within the whole European space, a space that the editors mention to be in permanent contact.

And that leads us to another issue of this book which is the time frame. While the book's title mentions Medieval and Early Modern Europe, the reader is told that the meeting that

originated this discussion focused between the 14th-17th centuries. Personally, I prefer the option of creating time frames based on centuries and not on large slices of time that everyone has enormous difficulty knowing when it starts and when it ends, however, I believe that this issue could have been solved with a discussion about time and cultural changes occurring in Europe at this period. The Middle Ages were not the same in Asturias as they were in Norway, also the capacity of acquiring porcelain in Denmark in the 17th century was not the same in Dalmatia and this discussion should have been made. While this may seem an obvious conclusion maybe the book needed some conclusive remarks after all the papers to create this perspective that the editors felt did not fit the introduction. It would have been interesting if some debate was made about how the compilation of these papers increases our knowledge of circulation. The introduction misses in debating how we should combine our efforts and talk about these things as a dialogue and not as eight monologues or chapters. This is not an easy discussion. The book travels in that direction but it would imply several hours of discussions between all the authors and editors that would go beyond the organization of a session. However, that is likely the direction of future material culture studies in a wide geography. In many of the papers, the authors reflect on how the phenomena they observe are also observable in other parts of Europe, but this discussion was not made on a conceptual framework that involved Europe in a globalized world, although the concept of different “timescales of globalization” is acknowledged.

The choice of the editors’ organization of the chapters is not quite perceptible and it seems based on the type of material culture analysed, rather than how movement is perceived in these studies. There are four papers about pottery, one on metal, one on glass, one on leather, and one on fossils (stone). Geographically these are located in Norway, Basque Country (Spain), Denmark, Asturias (Spain), Jutland (Denmark), Dalmatia (Croatia), Poland, and Sweden and address movement in different ways.

All the papers based on pottery and glass assume movement is motivated by domestic consumption and the way this movement can be used to discuss different social aspects. The paper concerning Norway is a paradigmatic example of movement in material culture since, as the author claims, there was no production of ceramics in that territory before the 17th century, thus every pot had to travel from foreign origins. This chapter is quite interesting since the author discusses not only the possibility of several interpretations but deals with one of the most usual problems in archaeological studies which is the lack of secure contextual information from where the objects were recovered, a common aspect for many countries and from excavations made many decades ago. Still using the concept of object biography this seems to be overcome in presenting different interpretations.

This discussion concerning the movement of foreign productions is also made for the Basque Country, more precisely the Araba Region, and the analysis of imported pottery. The major concern in this paper is not to describe pots but use them to discuss human and non-human relations and how these relations can lead to inequality and power relations, transmitting how social groups were organized. This seems to be the traditional way archaeologists usually look at imported pots, however, the author goes beyond demonstrating how these imported wares entered the everyday life of common people through imitation by local potters and how something that initially was used to create social differentiation became part of more complex social processes.

The paper which discusses the consumption of imported pottery in Asturias is one of the most traditional approaches to archaeology in the book. The chapter reflects the

analysis that the author has developed in the last decade where Miguel Busto Zapico has become one of the best experts in recognizing the characteristics of Spanish and imported wares in Spain. So it is with no surprise that we read that the paper considered 3066 sherds to discuss the movements of pots in Asturias and a delight for pottery addicts especially when the author discusses imports in different time frames of Asturias and the relation of this territory with several parts of Europe with a well-established commercial flow, clearly locating this region within a broader European perspective. A technical note should be added here since this paper is paradigmatic in a general issue in the book about the small size of images, almost in need of a magnifying glass to understand them, and how it makes interpretation very difficult.

Although the book located the four chapters about pottery as the first ones, the chapter discussing Venetian glass consumption in the Balkans, based on distribution, and discussing aspects such as consumer identity and economic exchange, mostly based on the presence and absence of these artefacts in coastal and inland areas, seems to be more in line with the other papers discussing imported European ceramics. Interesting that the author did not illustrate the chapter with images from these vessels and instead choose to provide several distribution maps.

Finally, the last chapter approaching domestic consumption was an interesting surprise because it provides an archaeological reading of the consumption of porcelain and tin glaze in Elsinore (Denmark) through the reading of inventories from 1590s and 1660s, comparing it to Dutch consumption. The most fascinating thing about this chapter is the ability to discuss the social base of consumption between locals and immigrants, rich and poor, and how porcelain endured for decades inside homes becoming heirlooms, without actually studying the objects per se, which creates a clear separation from all the other papers.

The movement of objects is undoubtedly the main aspect of this book, however in the chapter discussing footwear in Elblag, a city located in the Baltic Sea with a direct connection to England, the topic is not about the movement of shoes but how shoe production was influenced by the movement of people and ideas, creating fashion trends. This is interesting especially because the paper does not aim for an inventory of shoes, although there is one in the end, but to discuss them in the wider concept of style at the time and what different shoes can tell about different people.

It was exciting to see a chapter based on pilgrim badges found in Jutland (Denmark), especially when I had to read at least one page to realize where this collection came from, meaning that the main discussion here is not about where things were found but their symbolic significance. The chapter is full of meaning about the importance of these objects in terms of economic, cultural, and social processes, and how movement motivates those characteristics.

The final chapter seems to have been intentionally located there because it is the only one that does not discuss artefacts recovered in archaeological excavations. The study of the fossil collection Kilian Stobaeus had in his museum in Upsalla where he was teaching, reveals that archaeological analysis is so much more than the seriation of typologies and how the idea of museum and archaeological collection does not need to have strict boundaries.

It is an interesting book about how different authors can join different types of research and the way material culture is observed. While most of them analyse objects originating from archaeological excavations, made with different methods, and recorded

differently, others provide an archaeological perspective to documents or museum collections. This heterogeneous organization makes the book even more stimulating.


All eight chapters approach the concept of materiality in different ways. Many of the authors seem to subscribe to Van Oyen's concept of a constellation of artefacts when discussing collections where the focus is given as much to the object as to the relational agency that the object has with everything else. Although this perception is always there it is the theoretical conceptualization of material culture that marks the difference between all the chapters, an ideological freedom of thought that the editors claim to have promoted. While some authors express an interest in the theory that allows them to study their artefacts, other authors try to create a connection to theoretical concepts such as entanglement, identity, and even movement on a broader conceptualization. This is quite interesting since most books about theoretical engagements with material culture tend to follow similar directions and here all authors created larger or smaller debates considering the needs of their study. And while in the introduction the editors focus a great deal of time discussing the absence of some debates on the book, it was quite interesting to see that while some authors prefer a bottom-up theory others prefer a top-down one.

Overall, neither of the papers is theory absent, they just used it in different measures. This is what makes this book so interesting since these chapters were written by people with different backgrounds at different levels of their careers and more than just studying material culture the authors frame different ways of analysing archaeological materials.

Tânia Casimiro

Instituto de Arqueologia e Paleociências (IAP),
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (FCSH),
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

tmcasimiro@fcs.unl.pt

 0000-0002-9471-6194