

Anthropology Book Forum

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Augé, C. Riley. 2022. *Field Manual for the Archaeology of Ritual, Religion, and Magic*. New York: Berghahn Books, 188 pg. (Hardcover)/274 pg. (eBook), ISBN 978-1-80073-503-3 (Hardcover)/ISBN 978-1-80073-504-0 (eBook).

Field Manual for the Archaeology of Ritual, Religion, and Magic by C. Riley Augé is a recent addition to a growing body of scholarship that could, potentially, redress some of the shortcomings of archaeology as a discipline by taking a critical look at the material culture associated with spiritual belief systems. As many undoubtedly remember from their introductory courses or seminars, there is the reoccurring joke in the archaeology community that stated that any unidentified artifact that was used for an unknown purpose will always be labeled as ‘ceremonial’ by the professional archaeologist. While this is always said with humor, the truth of the matter is that many archaeologists have labeled artifacts as ‘ceremonial’ when they are ignorant of the actual religious beliefs of the cultures or communities that they are attempting to study. This issue is legitimate cause for concern and has, in fact, resulted in a poor understanding of the actual spiritual beliefs, religions, and rituals of past cultures. In regards to this, Augé even states, “Not all unknown, enigmatic, or supposedly anomalous objects are ritualistic,” on a list entitled, “The Basics: What Everyone Should Know” (p.2).

This edition is a compact 188 pages for the hardcover and approximately 274 pages for the eBook but the latter may vary depending on the device that is being used to read the eBook. Regardless of format, the book is organized into an “Introduction”; Defining Ritual, Religion, and Magic (Chapter 1); Classification and Typology (Chapter 2); Ritual, Religion, and Magic Functions and Devices (Chapter 3); Ritual, Religion, and Magic by Ethnicity and Religion (Chapter 4); Ritual, Religion, and Magic at Particular Site Types (Chapter 5); Ritualistic, Sacred, and Magical Landscapes (Chapter 6); Ritualistic, Religious, and Magical Material Culture by Material Type and Attribute (Chapter 7); Sensory Elements in Ritual, Religion, and Magic (Chapter 8); Forms and Templates (Chapter 9); Technologies, Methodologies, and Analyses (Chapter 10); Resources

(Chapter 11). The majority of the chapters of the book are organized with short introductory sections before presenting lists and charts with information relevant to the associated chapter. In addition to the chapters, the book has three different glossaries: Glossary of Ritualistic, Religious, and Magical Gems and Other Stones; Glossary of Ritualistic, Religious, and Magical Plants; Glossary of Ritualistic, Religious, and Magical Terms. Finally, there is a section entitled “Further Reading” and an Index. The book has no bibliography as there are no in-text citations or references.

At a time when the field of archaeology is looking for increased specialization on subject matter, geographical area, and methodology for books, conferences, and peer reviewed papers, Augé's book stands out in the literature for the geographic width and temporal breadth that it covers. Rituals and magical beliefs from all continents, excluding Antarctica, are included in the book. In regards to the temporal range that the book covers, Augé doesn't included any specific dates or time periods throughout their work. Instead, the reader is offered sections entitled “Ancient World” (pp.38-9), that includes Mesopotamian, Sumerian, Babylonian, and Egyptian rituals and religious beliefs among others, while other chapters mention the magical beliefs and rituals of French, American, and British soldiers during World War II. In addition to this, Augé does a commendable job of covering a wide range of religious beliefs. While covering the main religions of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, there are separate sections for some of the less acknowledged religions such as Rastafarianism, Shinto, and Vodou as well as several others. The lists and charts of the book are useful for an overview of the ritualism, religions, or magical beliefs of a given area or group. However, Augé mentions throughout the book that rituals and beliefs vary among different regions, time periods, ethnic groups, and communities. It is stressed that rituals, and the beliefs that such rituals embody, are highly complex and volatile cultural expressions. It bears repeating here, as well, because ethnic groups and people of color living in North America have been subjected to systemic racism, stereotyping, and media misrepresentation. The rituals and religious beliefs of Native Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Asians, and Africans have been presented in popular media as a homogenous mass with no regard for accuracy, understanding, or regional variations in cultural practices and beliefs. The archaeologist, historian, or anthropologist working in North America needs to keep such things in mind when attempting to study the sites and the related material culture of these groups. Furthermore, while Augé thoroughly describes ritual sites associated with organized religions and spiritual beliefs, they also

identify that secular spaces are commonly organized around rituals as well. This is especially applicable to sites associated with military, educational, and civic functions.

In the Introduction, Augé states that their book was written as a resource for historic preservationists, renovators, and construction workers as well as professional archaeologists. It should be stressed that it is also very applicable for those archaeologists and architectural historians working in cultural resource management (CRM) and heritage management. CRM, as an industry, is highly competitive and professionals are expected to produce high-quality work in a timely manner while practicing ethical business practices and respect the interests of clients, the state or federal government, and members of the public and affected communities including Native American tribal governments. Augé has created a great resource for CRM that is practical, easily understood, and easily referenced. The book contains an entire chapter for forms (Chapter 9) that can be copied, altered, and utilized to document ritual sites and cultural material as well as a useful introduction to applicable terminology for the study of rituals. The terms include; intentionally concealed objects (ICOs), traditional cultural properties (TCPs), culturally modified ecofacts (CMEs), and culturally modified trees (CMTs). For many readers, even the professional archaeologists, this book will likely be the first time they have been presented with such terms and their subjects. Additionally, the book also provides wonderful summaries and overviews of new technologies and methodologies that are highly applicable for the archaeology of rituals. This is especially true for Augé's descriptions of 3-D scanning, chemical residue analysis, metal detecting, and ground penetrating radar (GPR) (pp.183-5). For the archaeologist or anyone else concerned with destruction and vandalism at archaeology sites, there are some great guidelines for the preservation and protection of pre-contact rock art (pp.118-20) in the book. For the students or the lay person, there are sections for additional resources that include scholarly journals, scholarly organizations, and the Material Culture of Magic (MCM) Database that are relevant to the study of archaeology and rituals. The fact that the book is largely organized in a series of lists and charts has been previously discussed in this review. This format can be easily referenced and studied for the reader who may want to identify ritual patterns specific to one ethnic group or religion. Alternatively, this format also highlights rituals related to other things such as gender, mortuary practices, health and wellness, and business success. However, this also means that the book presents a large amount of information with hardly any context. It would have been more ideal to include case studies in some of the chapters that identify real ritual, religious, or magic-related

sites that have been documented by archaeologists. Regardless, Augé's book is still a valuable resource for the archaeologists, scholars, and anyone working in construction and CRM.

As a whole, this book is a timely and practical contribution to a growing body of archaeological knowledge and scholarship. The current understanding of religions, rituals, and magical beliefs in the archaeological record is limited but Augé's work is quality research on the subject and it can assist other archaeologists with both fieldwork and cultural study. *Field Manual for the Archaeology of Ritual, Religion, and Magic* would be a wonderful addition to an academic library and to the personal library of the archaeologist.

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