

Nan A. Rothschild and Diana diZerega Wall



The American Experience in Archaeological Perspective

“Unrivaled in scope. An essential work for urban historical archaeologists.”

—**ADRIAN PRAETZELLIS**, author of *Dug to Death*

“An engaging and astonishingly comprehensive work that reveals just how much our knowledge of America’s cities and the lives of city dwellers has been enriched through urban archaeology.”

—**MARY C. BEAUDRY**, coeditor of *Archaeologies of Mobility and Movement*

AMERICAN CITIES have been built, altered, redeveloped, destroyed, reimagined, and rebuilt for nearly 300 years in order to accommodate growing and shrinking populations and their needs.

Urban archaeology is a unique subfield with its own peculiar challenges and approaches to fieldwork. Understanding the social forces that influenced the development of American cities requires more than digging; it calls for the ability to extrapolate from limited data, an awareness of the dynamics that drive urban development, and theories that can build bridges to connect the two.

At the forefront of this exciting field of research, Nan Rothschild and Diana Wall are well suited to introduce this fascinating topic to a broad readership. Following a brief introduction, the authors offer specific case studies of work undertaken in New York, Philadelphia, Tucson, West Oakland, and many other cities. Ideal for undergraduates, *The Archaeology of American Cities* utilizes the material culture of the past to highlight recurring themes that reflect distinctive characteristics of urban life in the United States.

NAN A. ROTHSCHILD, director of the Museum Studies Program and professor of anthropology at Barnard College, Columbia University, is the author of three books, including *New York City Neighborhoods: The 18th Century*. **DIANA DIZEREGA WALL**, professor of anthropology at the City College of the City University of New York, is the author of *The Archaeology of Gender* and the coauthor of *Unearthing Gotham*.

A volume in the series the American Experience in Archaeological Perspective, edited by Michael S. Nassaney

Front, top: Plan of New Orleans, September 1723. Courtesy of Map Collection, Yale University Library and Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans*. University of Chicago Press. *Bottom:* Overview of the Stadt Huys Block, New York City, while it was under excavation in 1979. William Duncan Strong Museum, Columbia University.

University Press of Florida

www.upf.com

ISBN 978-0-8130-4972-4



9 780813 049724

Contents

List of Figures viii

Foreword ix

Preface xiii

1. Studying Cities 1

2. Urbanization and Its Archaeological Study in the United States 16

3. Landscape, Planning, and Infrastructure: City as Artifact 38

4. Trade, Manufacture, and Services in the City 71

5. Race and Ethnicity in the City 102

6. Class and Gender in the City 134

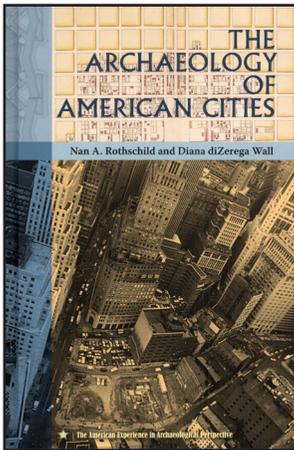
7. Cemeteries and Commemoration in the City 159

Conclusion 185

Notes 193

References 197

Index 217



The Archaeology of American Cities

Nan A. Rothschild and Diana diZerega Wall. 2014. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, 256 pages, 20 figures, \$69.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Dr. Claire P. Dappert, Illinois State Archaeological Survey, Prairie Research Institute, University of Illinois.

Archaeology in modern cities was rarely undertaken prior to the 1970s, partly out of a belief that the integrity of subsurface deposits was compromised by years of subsequent development and redevelopment. However, as explained in Chapter 2 of *The Archaeology of American Cities*, the introduction of environmental compliance legislation

in the 1970s mandated archaeological testing in certain cases where urban development was planned. After excavations in major cities like New York, San Francisco, and New Orleans, doubts concerning the presence of intact or meaningful archaeological deposits were proven to be ill-founded. Excavations in the Midwest have led to similar conclusions. The archaeological potential of urban centers like St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Louisville has been realized only in the past few decades.

This book serves not only to detail the historical development of this specialized subfield of historical archaeology; it also serves as a catalyst for more in-depth research on reoccurring themes, like ethnicity, race, class, and gender within urban contexts. The interwoven yet diverse subject matter, as well as the constant reminders throughout this book that urban archaeology is in line with two of the four global processes that historical archaeology at large seeks to understand—capitalism and the expansion of the modern world—highlight how historical archaeology has contributed to the study of urbanization over the past 40 years or so. *The Archaeology of American Cities* is an effective synthesis of some of the most influential urban archaeological studies in the United States and works as an ideal summary volume for undergraduate students or professionals who require a stepping-stone towards more in-depth topics.

Nan A. Rothschild and Diana diZerega Wall state that the strength of studying cities is that it allows for two scales of analysis: the macro and the micro. These two scales form the basic framework for the book. The macro level looks at the city as a whole, or as an artifact. It examines the city from above—from a bird's eye view—to look at changes in the cityscape over time, including city planning and infrastructure (Chapter 3). The micro level examines people who lived in the cities, who worked in diverse manufacturing and service industries (Chapter 4), and who are characterized by different attributes of ethnicity, race (Chapter 5), class, and gender (Chapter 6) through their materiality. One of the primary goals of this book is to explore the relationship between the changing geographical landscape of the city and the sociocultural characteristics of constant changing populations. To this end, the authors combine materiality with historical documentation to create “a richly nuanced picture of urban lives and places” (p. 1).

Book Review

While reading this book, I couldn't help but notice that the studies presented in the book are biased towards the major east and west coast cities. Upon reflection, though, I realize that this may not necessarily be the fault of the authors. In some ways, I believe that urban archaeology in the Midwest has lagged behind, and those publications that do exist are, with few exceptions, mostly buried in hard to find literature. This needn't be the case.

Overall, *The Archaeology of American Cities* is of high academic integrity, well researched, and suitable for the classroom. At the same time, the book remains accessible to the general public interested in historic archaeology by detailing the historical development of the field itself and through readers being able to relate to the subject matter. After all, life in urban areas is an experience more and more common to prospective readers. Rothschild and Wall should be commended for their straightforward approach and effective synthesis of such a vast amount of urban archaeological studies.