
There are reference books that can lead even a casual browser to a lifelong fascination with a subject. Some can even achieve this at a reasonable price. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, associate professor of Irish folklore at University College Dublin and multimedia broadcaster, has added just such a work to his oeuvre of more than forty works on Irish life, history, and lore with this one-volume encyclopedia. More than 350 alphabetic entries run the gamut of subjects necessary to the work’s ambitious scope, covering with equal weight actual historical and political figures (William of Orange, Patrick Sarsfield, Brian Boromha), the creatures and common subjects of legend (banshee, giants, outlaws, pigs, hags), and broader topics and motifs (Irish language, human life, sports and pastimes). Cross-referenced entries range from a brief paragraph to five to six full pages and include sources. The majority of subjects are treated comprehensively, with great care paid to covering the origins, contexts, and chronological and thematic development of individual myths and legends. A “List of Genres” can help a researcher with chronology and broad category, as it sorts entries into ten broad categories, such as fianna lore, king lore, and romantic history, but a full subject index is lacking. A guide to the pronunciation of Irish-language entries and a bibliography complete the back matter.

This work serves as a complement to and provides deeper treatment of any shared entries from such works as Jo O’Donoghue and Sean McMahon’s Brewer’s Dictionary of Irish Phrase and Fable (Cassell, 2005). It lacks the contemporary coverage of this and other works, as befits its stated purpose. Libraries wishing to purchase more general reference materials on Ireland should first consider such comprehensive works as editor Brian Lalor’s The Encyclopedia of Ireland (Yale, 2003).

This economical encyclopedia serves both the beginner and the scholar with authority. Recommended for any reference collection. Highly recommended for academic collections that support folklore, mythology, Irish studies, Gaelic, or medieval studies programs.—Jenn B. Stidham, Public Services Librarian, Houston Community College-Northeast, Texas


Milestones in Archaeology by Tim Murray, a professor of archaeology at La Trobe University in Melbourne and editor of The Encyclopedia of Archaeology (ABC-Clio, 1999–2001), presents a chronological overview of the history of archaeology. Murray has attempted to present archaeology’s “greatest hits” in a format that is “a middle ground between a straightforward work of reference . . . and an extended narrative of the history of archaeology” (xiv), his goal being “to explore different ways of communicating with both specialist and nonspecialist audiences” (xiv). In this he partially succeeds.

The volume comprises two hundred entries divided into three major chronological time periods, “Archaeology before 1800,” “Archaeology in the Nineteenth Century,” and “Archaeology in the Twentieth Century and Beyond.” Each section begins with an essay that gives an overview and puts into historical context the themes that dominated archaeological thought and practice during that period. The entries themselves range from a few paragraphs to several pages and were chosen based on priority, influence on subsequent archaeological practice, and whether the field or area of practice was particularly influential. Well-known topics with substantial secondary literature often are more cursorily examined in order to give more space to other entries. There is a section of black-and-white maps that give the location of most of main sites mentioned in the text, a chronological list of the milestones included in the volume, and a comprehensive index. Bibliographical references are included at the end of each entry and essay.

Murray has chosen to select and write all of the essays and entries himself, which gives the entire text a uniformity of voice and philosophy. As he admits, all historiographies of archaeology are selective (one could argue that this is true of all scholarship), and therefore what is included and what is left out are necessarily a product of the author’s own views and biases. For example, much of the recent work being done in Egypt, including the long-term projects at Abydos and on the Giza plateau, has not been individually covered, although the recent 2000 symposium at Giza did get its own entry. However, Murray does a fine job of including a wide range of topics that encompass the entire world of archaeology. The essays and entries themselves are clearly written in plain English and are accessible to most readers.

Murray’s experiment with the “middle ground” is a little less successful. The strict chronological order of the volume does allow comparisons of the state of archaeology across the world at any one particular moment. However, this format also makes the history of archaeology in any one location difficult to follow because the entries are spread throughout the book. More problematic is the intended audience. Although