

***Unburied Lives: The Historical Archaeology of Buffalo Soldiers, Fort Davis, Texas, 1869–1875.* Laurie A. Wilkie. 2021. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque. xxiii + 274 pp. \$65.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-8263-6299-5. \$65.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-8263-6300-8.**

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Laurie A. Wilkie's *Unburied Lives* is a fascinating and welcome addition to the literature. Although it focuses on a specific group, place, and time—the Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Davis, Texas, in the early 1870s—the book offers insights for other archaeologists investigating those whose lives are unrecorded or suppressed in our histories. “Buffalo Soldiers” is a nickname given to African Americans who served in all-Black Army units created after the US Civil War. Among these units was the 25th Infantry, the people at the heart of *Unburied Lives*.

Unearthing specific occupations in a fort can be difficult because of the palimpsest of activities that exists as a result of many different military occupations. At Fort Davis, Wilkie was fortunate to find several trash deposits and other loci associated primarily with 25th Infantry occupation of the early 1870s. Interpreting the relatively sparse materials by themselves would have yielded a thin description. Wilkie therefore “excavated” primary sources in the National Archives to complement the archaeology, mining them for information on the Buffalo Soldiers. Such archival research in archaeology is a daunting endeavor because the records reflect the needs of the record-keepers, not the researcher. Army clerks were more intent on logging information on expenditures than anything else. The little information they kept on personnel focused more on the white officers than the Buffalo Soldiers. In this context, as Wilkie notes, it is vital to pay attention not only to what the primary sources say but to how/why they were created, then curated and/or discarded.

As a fellow Buffalo Soldier researcher, I am in awe of what she was able to accomplish. The thick description of the soldiers and their lives at Fort Davis—gleaned from a few pension, courts martial, and other records, complemented by the archaeology—is nothing short of astonishing. Wilkie vividly brings to life a period, a place, and, especially, a group of *individuals*, who have long remained in the shadows.

Wilkie's contributions lie not just in the facts and stories she was able to unearth. She also does a beautiful job of drawing on a wide range of theory to present a fresh perspective. Central to her argument is Achille Mbembe's concept of “necropolitics,” or “the process by which states create communities of ‘fellows’ and ‘non-fellows’ and instill structural and institutional practices that naturalize the abuse, neglect, or even death of non-fellows” (p. 9). As Wilkie points out, Black men saw soldiering as a way to assert their role as fellows or full American citizens in the face of white resistance. Her account focuses on their attempts to do so.

Wilkie's book is engagingly written. Each chapter begins with a story drawn from accounts of a particular incident involving specific soldiers, which she then weaves into a narrative about related topics using archaeological and archival information. The book itself begins dramatically in the prologue by describing the death of a Black soldier at Fort Davis and questioning the officially accepted account. The incident serves to highlight Wilkie's approach to offering more nuanced and complete views of the past by interrogating established narratives. In Chapter 1, she sets the scene for her research, providing the general historical, archaeological, and theoretical background. In the chapters that follow, she builds an intimate picture of Black Fort Davis life, beginning in Chapters 2 and 3 with the objects the Buffalo Soldiers used and the social spaces they inhabited. Chapter 4 looks at the fort's hierarchical social structure and relationships between the fort and the nearby town. Chapter 5 discusses education and, especially, literacy—a key to citizenship for Black Soldiers—closely examining the context and materiality of document creation and retention. Chapter 6 explores relationships

within the Black community, from friendships and disputes to intimate partnerships. In Chapter 7, Wilkie returns to the prologue incident and provides a new—and shocking—accounting of what really happened, based on the rich context she has previously built. It is a tour de force.

Some flaws mar the powerful impact this book makes, apparently due to faulty copyediting, which failed to catch several distracting errors (grammar, punctuation, etc.). None are serious enough, however, to detract from the overall read or the quality of the scholarship. Altogether, *Unburied Lives* makes several important contributions. It not only illuminates the lives of the Buffalo Soldiers but also provides an intriguing approach to historical archaeology, broadly applicable to other underrepresented groups. It has certainly reshaped my thinking on how to report these rich, untold stories.

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***Beer: A Global Journey through the Past and Present.* John W. Arthur. 2022. Oxford University Press, Oxford. v + 294 pp. \$24.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-19757-980-0.**

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I was excited to receive an electronic copy of this book, one that promises to update the growing field of commensal studies with a synthetic, cross-cultural work that would, in John W. Arthur's words, "reveal the variety of ways beer is integrated in people's lives through their technology, health, social status, rituals, and economics" (p. 3). Chapter 1 does not disappoint, given that there is much introduced regarding the ubiquitous roles of women and nonelite actors in nonindustrial brewing. The tone wavers between conversational and academic, but it is clearly meant to be widely accessible. No single overdetermining or celebrational theory drives the narrative, and instead there is a balanced recognition of beer's historical role in both joining and dividing people.

My critical comments below are focused on sections concerning ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and to a lesser degree, the Levant—areas with which I have relative familiarity. In those sections, one finds a troubling lack of precision in both expression and research that may speak more to the state of academic publishing than the author's clearly positive intentions. My impression is that the book's key contribution is ethnoarchaeological, but I will leave others to judge if the recipes in the final chapter are worth replicating, or to divine what ritual is implied by the "catching" of Gamo elites (p. 8).

From an anthropological or archaeological perspective, a primary issue is that the author fails to define the subject clearly. Likewise, there is neither review of the field nor any clearly stated methodology. Again, the style appears conversational, though at times it feels insular, and casual readers may resent having to search footnotes to source quotations that appear in chapter and section headings. Arthur appears to limit the topic to fermented cereal drinks (i.e., beers) yet includes Medieval aqua vitae (which were distilled spirits), "banana beer," and the famous Neolithic mixture of beer and wine from Jiahu (China) as if they were all the same thing.

Arthur refers to "the Mesopotamian state society" (p. 12) as if there were not many empires and states in that region's long history. Beers were "produced along the Nile as part of the most iconic state societies" (p. 12), making an awkward colloquialism at best. If the author or Oxford University Press wants archaeologists to take this seriously while simultaneously finding broad readership, this is hardly the way. Basic descriptions of places and names are clumsily rendered—for example, a "ceramic jar at Godin Tepe site" (p. 19); Egyptian sites spelled as if they were in Israel (with "Tel"); or an ancient Egyptian woman, Meresankh, identified as a site (p. 27). Again, something is called "iconic" that is