



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Review of Acabado, S.; Martin, M. (2022) Indigenous archaeology in the Philippines: decolonizing Ifugao history

Lilley, I.

Citation

Lilley, I. (2023). Review of Acabado, S.; Martin, M. (2022) Indigenous archaeology in the Philippines: decolonizing Ifugao history. *American Antiquity*, 88(2), 274-275. doi:10.1017/aaq.2022.99

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3704738>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Despite my quibbles, *Modeling Entradas* is an interesting and useful volume, and I highly recommend it, particularly to researchers engaged in the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonial encounters in the US Southeast. It is a book I am sure that I will often consult.

doi:10.1017/aaq.2022.101

***Indigenous Archaeology in the Philippines: Decolonizing Ifugao History.* Stephen B. Acabado and Marlon M. Martin. 2022. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. xx + 226 pp. \$60.00 (hardcover) ISBN 978-0-8165-4502-5. \$60.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-81654-532-2.**

Ian Lilley

School of Social Science, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

I visited the Ifugao rice terraces in 2006 after attending a conference. I was stunned by the spectacular vista and the thought of the labor required by the local Indigenous communities to construct and maintain the structures. I was also intrigued by the chatter among my colleagues that the terraces may be nowhere near as old as they were proclaimed to be, most notably in their 1995 World Heritage inscription. The importance of that prospect did not sink in at the time; after all, we archaeologists routinely revise chronologies. About a decade later, I was back in the Philippines on a World Heritage mission. It concerned a different place, but by then I was acquainted with the work brought together in Stephen B. Acabado and Marlon M. Martin's book. I recognized I was struggling with many of the same issues. I was relieved that I was not alone in an endeavor that is vital not only to the progress of archaeology and cultural heritage in the Philippines but also more broadly in a decolonizing world where community engagement is—or should be—standard professional practice.

So, what are these crucial issues that Acabado and Martin address? There are several overlapping concerns, but underlying the entire effort is the basic archaeological question of the terraces' antiquity. Their World Heritage listing pivots on the assertion that they are ancient, precolonial edifices (UNESCO 1992–2022, "Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras," <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/722/>); it describes the terraces as the "priceless contribution of Philippine ancestors to humanity. Built 2000 years ago and passed on from generation to generation, the Ifugao Rice Terraces represent an enduring illustration of an ancient civilization that surpassed various challenges and setbacks posed by modernization."

Acabado and Martin demonstrate that this contention underpins not only UNESCO's listing but also broader conceptions of Philippine history and conflicted understandings of and attitudes to the Indigenous people who built the terraces, not least on the part of those people themselves. The authors add their own archaeological results from the long-running Ifugao Archaeological Project (IAP) to past anthropological and archaeological work, arguing persuasively that the structures are no more than a few centuries old and were built in response to Spanish colonization. As the book explains, this finding has profound implications beyond the revised chronology. It forces a rethinking of demonstrably erroneous models of Philippine history that are intimately entwined in the nation's identity. It challenges the assessment of authenticity and integrity that are bedrock considerations in World Heritage listings. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it reorients not only external perceptions of the Indigenous communities who own and work the terraces but also the self-conceptions of those communities themselves. Those self-understandings have been deeply affected by centuries of colonial education and government policies that deny Indigenous capabilities and agency.

That last point highlights the issue of collaborating with local people. Like many local communities, those living near the Ifugao terraces are ambivalent about World Heritage listings but in this case are

invested to varying degrees in the idea that the terraces are ancient. Community archaeology of this sort is rightly *de rigueur* in most parts of the world these days for obvious ethical reasons. In many jurisdictions, including the Philippines, engaging in community archaeology requires not only gaining the trust and cooperation of the people involved but also navigating often difficult permitting processes around community access. External gatekeepers regularly block or complicate access, even when the communities themselves have granted informed consent. As the authors make clear, it takes continual effort to bring the communities and the gatekeepers along together throughout a project's duration. It is a testament to the commitment of the authors and their team that they managed to pull this off, let alone while dismantling centuries of misinformation and prejudice about the terrace builders.

Finally, there is the issue of the World Heritage listing. It is not a subsidiary complication but rather a core consideration. That is because it is simultaneously a symptom of the problematic ideas addressed by the IAP and a key reason for these ideas' persistence and pernicious effects on local communities. As intimated earlier, I am both a practitioner in and a researcher of the World Heritage system, with a focus on Indigenous issues; see Ian Lilley, Kristal Buckley, and Helena Kajlich, "World Heritage and Human Rights in Australia: The Case of Fraser Island," in *World Heritage and Human Rights: Lessons from the Asia Pacific and the Global Arena*, edited by Peter Bille Larsen (Routledge, 2017); and Celmara Pocock and Ian Lilley, "Who Benefits? World Heritage and Indigenous People: Australia in Global Context," *Heritage and Society* 10, no. 2 (2017): 171–190. I am keenly aware of the problems canvassed by Acabado and Martin, and I know they are not alone in their critique, which is continually echoed around the world. It is the subject of much soul-searching on the part of many practitioners, as well as of regular adjustments to World Heritage policy and practice. Nonetheless, effecting change is a slow, uneven process. Even within a single jurisdiction, progress in one case is not necessarily matched by wider advances. This is not the place for an extended discussion of these matters. Rather, I would note that Acabado and Martin demonstrate how heritage management up to and including the highest global levels is enmeshed in the efforts of archaeologists and other heritage practitioners to decolonize their practice and rethink orthodox but ill-founded and fundamentally unethical models of deep history that undermine the autonomy of and justice for Indigenous and other minorities.

In this and the related matters they address, Acabado and Miller's study is both a telling case study of one group of Indigenous people and, at a more abstract level, the story of all the Indigenous and disadvantaged minorities with which archaeologists and heritage practitioners engage around the planet. The volume is therefore of great value not only to those interested in Philippine archaeology and heritage but also to anyone involved with archaeology and heritage in the world today. I urge you to read it.

doi:10.1017/aaq.2022.99

***Atlas of the Hillforts of Britain and Ireland.* Gary Lock and Ian B. M. Ralston. 2022. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. xvi + 487 pp. \$195.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9781474447126. \$195.00 (e-book, PDF), ISBN 9781474447140. \$195.00 (e-book, ePub), ISBN 978-1-474447157.**

Susan A. Johnston

Department of Anthropology, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA

Hillforts have held a special place in Irish and British archaeology for as long as the discipline has existed. Their often-identifiable surface presence led to their inclusion on the earliest antiquities