



Museums and the Construction of Disciplines: Art and Archaeology in Nineteenth-century Britain (Debates in Archaeology)

Christopher Whitehead

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Museums and museum politics were important elements in the development of the disciplines of Archaeology and Art History in nineteenth-century Britain. Here Christopher Whitehead explores some of the key debates and events which led to the conceptual differentiation and physical separation of 'archaeological' and 'artistic' material culture, looking especially at the ways in which objects and histories were contested within museum politics. For example, in the 1850s, the status of Egyptian antiquities as 'art' or 'archaeology' was keenly debated, and this related closely to questions about which kinds of museum should house them and the possible histories and epistemologies in which they might figure. This concise study serves as a basis for a discussion of the continued intellectual legacy of this for our understanding, management and presentation of the past in the museum and in curricula. It is argued that by understanding the politics and circumstances through which the two disciplines were delimited and distinguished from one another we may be able to glimpse, retrospectively, the possibility of alternative art histories and alternative archaeologies.

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