The Return of the Parthenon Marbles.

The possible restitution of the Parthenon Marbles is still a current issue in cultural politics, and an issue whose resolution may have consequences for the problem of the restitution of cultural property in general.

The reality of the problem has become increasingly obvious and it recently (12th October) culminated in the formal Greek demand for the Parthenon Marbles.

Changes can be detected within the attitudes of the public, politicians, and academicians, as reflected in the frequent coverage of the issue in newspapers and on television and radio. Much of this is due to the thorough research and extensive lobbying of The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles. The work of this committee, which includes the publication of a booklet, a survey among members of Parliament, representation at international conferences on the problem of restitution and extensive press coverage of their activities, is, in itself a unique and impressive example of the power and potential of 'grass-roots' activities which, in the future, cultural objects, however old or exotic, can have political and symbolic value of considerable importance. As international cultural councils have suggested should be the case. And, will archaeologists recognise and accept this as well?

What is required is the ability to express complex ideas in a clear way something at which archaeologists are most certainly must have been in everyone's mind. Among nearly 1000 voting delegates there were no votes against the resolution. Only 30 abstentions (half of which constituted the five-member British delegation). In comparison with the 1982 UNESCO conference, where 52 countries were in favour of the return of the Marbles compared to 26 abstentions and 11 against, this seems to signal a significant change in international attitudes towards the problem of restitution. Delegates from West Germany, Holland and Denmark, countries which in 1982 voted against the return of the Parthenon Marbles, now positively support the return of the Marbles (ref. the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles).

Against this background it will be very interesting to see the degree and manner in which changes expressed in these international councils will be reflected in the real world of policy making. The formal demand for the Marbles has turned the issue into a political question, where the decision might set a norm for future actions, will the politicians for whom the cultural objects, however old or exotic, can have political and symbolic value of considerable importance, as international cultural councils have suggested should be the case. And, will archaeologists recognise and accept this as well?

The Interpretation of the Archaeological Heritage.

As issue 2:1 of ARC showed, archaeologists are becoming increasingly aware of the need both to serve the public and to be accountable to it.

However, there is, as often, a great disjunction between what is said and what is done. Archaeologists rarely consider what will happen to the product of their work material and natural remains, site plans, photographs, etc. after they have been used to produce a report and safely housed in an archive. The task of curating this archive is then often left to museum workers, who, partly through lack of funds, are rarely able to present the results of archaeological research in a way that is interesting to anyone other than a committed student of archaeology.

I feel that if archaeologists want to serve the public and not just themselves, then the results of archaeological research must be communicated in intelligible fashion to as wide a number of people as possible. The large numbers of people in treasure-hunting clubs, interested in genealogy, local history, and 'heritage' programmes on television show how much enthusiasm there is for the past. Archaeologists, on channel this interest by writing not just for their academic peers, but also for someone with only a passing interest in archaeology; by using amateurs in their research; by giving guides and lectures, by publishing popular accounts of their work; and by giving advice on the way evidence should be presented via all the audio and visual media.

The funds are available to do this sort of work. The financial magnates in the City have been persuaded recently to invest in tourism, and Government grants totalling £35 million a year are available for the tourism and leisure industry. One place where novel interpretation methods have been used -- the Viking Jorvik Centre in York -- received the maximum grant for such a heritage project from the English Tourist Board.

It is easy to sneer at such attempts at popularisation. However, why not retire into academic pedantry. A more productive approach would be for archaeologists, whether in museums, field units or research establishments, to join forces with those experienced in tourism, interpretation and mass communication in order to present a past which is widely intelligible. These popularisations do not have to take the form of traditional 'histories' of particular periods or peoples; issues of current debate can also be communicated to a wider audience. The archaeology of mind is potentially of just as great (if not more) interest to the public as the archaeology of Roman Britain.

What is required is the ability to express complex ideas in a clear way -- something at which archaeologists

to availability and nature of work -- makes them very important for generations of unestablished archaeologists. It seems essential to discuss these aspects of our subject, and ARC welcomes comments and letters concerning these issues.
ologists do not excel. Without communicating the results of archaeological research to the people whose past they have been studying, archaeologists have not completed their task.

Nonsense and Jargon in Contemporary Archaeology - A Plea!

The last decade or so has witnessed the publication of a truly substantial amount of archaeological literature which may be fairly classified as apparent nonsense. Apparent because the level of jargon in such publications has now reached such a pitch that it is difficult to decide whether the authors are writing sheer gibberish or are merely indulging in a feast of obscure terminology. The situation has, indeed, become grim. One can spend many hours ploughing through a paper and looking up the technical language before arriving at the painful conclusion that the effort has been wasted and the content is quite specious. Furthermore, even in those cases where the paper, upon decoding, actually makes sense and is of some interest, it is all too often the case that the text could have been put more concisely, more plainly and in fewer words with fewer syllables.

At the risk of appearing partisan, it must be stated that the situation is many times worse in the United States than in Britain. This may be related to the volume of archaeological literature published in that country. The quite prodigious amount of material which goes to press each year in America is not, I think, matched by an equally prodigious wealth of original and useful ideas. On the contrary, there is something of a chasm there between quantity and quality. Papers which, scarcely two decades ago would never have been considered for publication now fill the burgeoning list of journals. Indeed, the quantity of text required yearly to float the proeedings, the journals, the colloquia, monograph series, reports, newsletters and so on which overwhelm our libraries does more than anything else to perpetuate and worsen the situation. And let us not be self-satisfied on this side of the Atlantic: British archaeology is not above such a circus but just (as usual) one step behind.

There is, of course, a place for technical words and phrases in modern archaeological writing; indeed, given the highly interdisciplinary nature of the subject, it would be almost impossible to avoid them. Authors writing papers which incorporate statistical techniques, chemical analysis or specialist information are more than entitled to include appropriate technical terms -- indeed, they would be foolish to invent new terminology, or to try to expand the existing terminology in plain English. More reluctantly we might be willing to accept the technical language which some have adopted from Sociology, Social Anthropology, Linguistics and Psychology 'modes of production', structural contradictions, Critical Theories, emic/etic distinctions and the 'construction of self' are all more or less necessary shorthand tools of the theoretical apparatus grafted onto modern archaeological studies. And then there are the equilibria, information potentials, feedbacks and so on of the New Archaeology. No, this is not the jargon which I am complaining about although it too makes for turgid and sometimes incomprehensible papers. The jargon which is truly offensive because specious is what, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, one might call 'thick jargon'.

Thick jargon is a particularly nasty mixture of -omies, -ologies, -ians, -ists and -aries which has the effect of Winston Churchill's 'terminological inexactitude': it too is couched in big words which attempt to hide what is being said. But whereas Churchill wished to hide his meaning because of its poignance, thick jargonists (if I may start to indulge in their predilection for inventing tags and -ist nouns) invariably have too little to say; Why, how many times has one stepped through line after line of systems, this, emic, that, societal variables, varieties, and goodness knows what else to come to the conclusion that it could all have been said so simply if it were not so banal and utterly self-evident? In truth there is nothing better designed to make one throw up one's hands in despair and to commence rewriting that it is chartered Accountant and Chartered Statistician is well to the end. For a good half hour only to find that it is all summed up in an incomprehensible sentence on page 29: 'In this case the conclusion may be seen from this substantive example that systemic inter-variability must be expected. In ceramic mode of production' (people make pots differently according to where and when they live and who they are).

We have had bad archaeology with us since the beginning and perhaps the thick jargonists are simply a space-age version of the cataloguers and 'butterfly collectors' of yesteryear; but it is surely time that we started to dig our heels in and to expose this fraudulent use, or abuse, of language. In the first place we could all start by asking ourselves 'Do I really need this term before adding another piece of obscure terminology to our papers? Still more importantly, all archaelogical students should be encouraged to justify their choice of language: too many tutors and supervisors quietly accept the screens of jargon-loaded paper which students turn in as essays. Admittedly, it would be quite unethical to dictate the language which must be used to express an idea. On the other hand, language is a maze in which it is all too easy to lose oneself; and not to discuss the choice of language is to encourage the mindless copying of superficially popular styles (such as exemplified by Clarke's 'Analytical Archaeology' and a loose and uncritical attitude.

Things have not yet reached the state in which we find American archaeological literature but we should not deceive ourselves into believing that British archaeology will avoid falling into similar errors through pure inertia. These are hard times for the profession and especially for the younger members of its ranks, and there are increasing pressures upon young academicians to publish quickly and extensively. Unless we are all very careful, thick jargon could become commonplace in Britain as it is in America. It is, unfortunately, already with us.

James Morley