different cultural roles.

In my opinion, women today are in a better position to initiate such studies. Due to present day gender relations, we do see the other side of the coin. Few women see themselves as "men's helper", and more women than men recognize the importance of accurately trivial everyday tasks separated from national economy and politics. Also, more women than men are outside what is, in our society the most influential and powerful positions, be it in business, university, or government. Our perception of power is still that women can do it, but they are bound to be different from that of many men, not least those who are at present constructing and interpreting this notion, whether in archaeology, anthropology or other disciplines.

Women thus have a great potential for contributing to a fuller and more balanced picture of the past. Unfortunately, we have not yet used this potential. But it is important that we start employing it, because if we are constantly presented with a picture of passive, inferior, women, that is what we will become.

Charlotte Dunn

This takes me back to the first part of this appeal: the asymmetry in the female:male ratio. How can we expect more women to take an active part in archaeology, if we do not show them that women and men are equal? My conclusion must be that we need more female archaeologists to study the role of prehistoric women and more studies of prehistoric women to encourage an increase in active female archaeologists!

References


John Grist

The Sweet Smell of the Past


The British Museum's exhibition must be seen as the most important revelation of British archaeology this decade; since its opening in July it has constantly attracted visitors -- archaeologists, the public, reviewers alike -- all in search of the "facts", all fascinated by the idea of an archaeology greatly improved and revolutionised, which since its inception, even during the days before the 2nd World War has evolved into a "scientific" discipline, ready to compete with any branch of physics or chemistry in terms of accuracy and technique. Such ideas as a) science is progress, b) progress is a good thing, and c) it is therefore to become properly acceptable in the enlightened 1980s archaeology must

unlift itself and be proud to be defined as science, are inherent in this exhibition.

When I first visited "Archaeology in Britain" I was disappointed to find that "New Views of the Past" did not mean an exhibition reviewing, for instance, recent Marxist perspectives on gender studies in archaeology. Its begetters appeared conservative and perhaps the exhibition was a well-behaved child who would inherit their knowledge and be loved by the masses. It seemed that in giving a sample of archaeological work to the public the Museum staff had decided to mostly ignore theoretical advances and not for Aristotle's wisdom, that "probable impossibilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities". I had an idea that I was having an important revelation about the minds of British archaeologists today: the assumption that archaeology should still be viewed as merely field and laboratory work can only be a direct inheritance from our pre-war precursors.

The second time I visited (for much longer) this disputably lovely child, I began to grow much more attached to it. I also began to appreciate the massive amounts of time and effort invested which had, in fact, led to the creation of a fascinating, well-informed and creatively presented exhibition. After three hours I had travelled a route following over eight thousand years of British history and was still little more than halfway through the galleries.

Roger Miles, an employee of the Natural History Museum, notes that the "first rule of successful exhibition design is to ensure that..."
preserved in such a way. This, moreover, is a problem with the whole exhibit -- emphasis on, for instance, defence from 1,000 BC to 43 AD unfortunately suggests that such things were exclusively important to those periods, and conversely, that nothing else was achieved of similar status.

From the outset, "Archaeology in Britain" underlines the importance of economic and technological advances, but rather than claiming modern humans to be the result of many millennia attempting to break from Nature's ball and chain, the exhibition attempts to show that we have always been entrepreneurs, exploiters of our landscape. The organisers must be lauded however, for not overtly expressing Britain's history in evolutionary terms. Thus, we are able to see Stone Age and Medieval watermills on equal terms as different aspects of human innovation.

Throughout the exhibition a major dichotomy is presented, as we are shown first how most people conducted their lives, then how they dealt with death. That the treatment of the dead was of central importance is made quite clear, but after initial generalisations about burial rituals, due to the extensive occurrence of megalithic tombs, the only tentative judgements on Iron Age death are offered. The glory of the Welwyn chariot burials is given much space, but the B.M. goes to great pains to inform visitors that archaeologists really knew nothing about later prehistoric burial practices in Britain and that these Yorkshire finds are quite reasonably attributed to Celtic immigrants. Disappointingly, no attempt is made to explain to the public the social implications of burial evidence, although visitors learn how wet conditions have rendered up knowledge of Bronze Age communication systems, they are left ignorant of possible social systems evident in grave ritual.

Whereas it only takes 15 tilted sections of the exhibition to impart archaeologists' knowledge of nearly 10,000 years, a large area of this journey through time is devoted to just a single find. Pete Marsh (Lindow Man) has undoubtedly achieved a super-star status he never would have received in his own time, since his discovery in a Cheshire peat bog in 1984. How delighted must the B.M. staff have been, to be able to draw on the full range of scientific techniques when exhibiting this one relic: an apt conclusion to an exhibition which constantly declares the importance of 'modern' advances. Lindow Man's greatest interest, however, must be that he is the only real individual to have been found in Britain, i.e. an item which constantly reminds us that archaeology isn't about preconceptions. The exhibition reflects the discoveries made in London over the last sixteen years by the museum's archaeological units. Rather than attempting to put forward general theories about the past, it concentrates on showing everyday life from the Iron Age to the post-medieval period. Cases are packed with fascinating selection of finds which have attracted much attention in the media, the 15th century loaded dice and the pilgrim badges being among the favourites.

One wall is completely devoted to a photographic diary of the excavation at Billingsgate market from 1982-83. Billingsgate may have been oversensationalised recently, but it serves as a useful guide to the problems of digging in a city constantly under the eye of impatient developers. Furthermore, the point is made that the archaeologists' worst enemies, the metal detectors, can be used to advantage, for the Society of Thames Mudlarkers and Antiquarians, who normally work the existing river foreshore, were instrumental in finding many artefacts in the river silt of this site. The exhibition is to be critiqued for its concentration on City archaeology, rather than that of Greater London, and, moreover, its almost complete lack of prehistoric interest. This latter point, however, again brings us back to the problems of urban archaeology: it seems, unfortunately, that excavators rarely have enough time to work below Roman levels.

It is unfair, in a way, to write about "Archaeology in Britain" and "Capital Gifts" in the same breath. Due to its smaller scale and range, the museum of London's exhibition is made to seem trivial. Although the former is undoubtedly more academic -- and even the latter's title tends to suggest it is more interesting in things than thoughts -- both exhibitions tend to give rise to the Michael Caine syndrome of "not a lot of people know that..."; from the B.M. I learnt that by the study of steloliths (fish 'ear bones'), the seasonal use of Mesolithic sites on Oronsay could be dated with extreme accuracy, whilst "Capital Gifts" taught me that 14th century shop-points were often so long that eventually laws were passed to limit their length to two inches.

Much of the knowledge imparted by "Archaeology in Britain" is familiar from an undergraduate archaeology course, but the success of the exhibition no doubt reflects its ability to bring archaeology to a great variety of people. Why exhibitions of old pots and bones
continue to attract public attention must be due to the inquisitive and romance-seeking minds of human beings. As Edward Thomas once said, "The past is the only dead thing that smells sweet".

References


Archaeology in a Political Context: Examples from Four Latin American Countries

Examination of the relationship between archaeology and politics has always been avoided. This neglects the fact that nothing is isolated from politics, least of all archaeology, which is by definition a socio-historical discipline. Although archaeology is non-political, archaeology should not be expected to avoid the scientific commitment of presenting the results as they appear in the course of archaeological investigation for fear of serving foreign interests.

Recently, Gero (1985) has discussed the relationship between prehistoric studies in some countries and the strengthening of nationalism entailing the submission of archaeology to the conditions of the society that supports it.

If one accepts the State as a political outcome of antagonistic groups within society, archaeologists have to face situations where the interests of different groups conflict. In these cases archaeologists have to take a stand that transcends the ambit of archaeology as a strictly academic discipline, by setting the problem in a proper political context. This paper presents four situations in four different countries, where archaeologists have recently taken such a stand, and so illustrates the relationship in practice between politics and archaeology.

The case of Chile

During the first part of 1985 Chilean scientists, including archaeologists, took interest in the fact that the Chilean Government had signed an agreement with the U.S.A. concerning the enlargement of the only airport in Easter Island, which belongs to Chile and is situated 3700 km from the mainland. Easter Island is one of the largest open air museums in the world. Although 9552 archaeological sites have been identified to date, of a total area of 180 km², only 20 km² have been surveyed (Cristino et al. 1980).

Supported by this publication, Chilean archaeologists disagreed with the official declaration which pronounced the state of archaeology in the island as satisfactory. Based on the fact that in two years eight researchers surveyed nine 3 x 30 km quadrats, Chilean archaeologists calculated that at this rate of work, by 1985 they would still be far from having enough information which would permit an adequate estimate of the necessary attention and protection of the archaeological heritage of Easter Island.

In view of the importance of Easter Island to the archaeological heritage of Chile and the world, the archaeologists of Chile have declared themselves against the prosed enlargement of the airport. Such enlargement will only benefit NASA while threatening the archaeological heritage of the island and the sovereignty of the whole nation.

Despite this protest, the decision has been taken to go ahead with the project, so Easter Island will be turned into a military base for operating strategic weapons belonging to the USA. This could involve the island and the whole of Chile in the so-called "Star Wars Program", currently the focus of East-West conflict. The voice of Miguel Ramírez, an archaeologist native to the Easter Island but educated in the USA, and presently Governor of the island, that the NASA project will not in any way endanger the archaeological heritage of the island and that investigations will continue with the help of foreign research teams. It is worth mentioning the participation amongst these of the Norwegian Professor Arne Skjold and the explorer Thor Heyerdal. The former declared to the Swedish newspaper "Dagens Nyheter" (2-2-1986), just a few days before leaving for the Island, that he disagreed with the protests against the enlargement of the airport.

As a result of this affair, there has been a change in the attitudes of Chilean archaeologists. For the first time in this country, archaeologists presented their arguments not only as the results of their research but also claimed a role in the protection of archaeological heritage, a task traditionally assigned to conventional political structures.

The case of Cuba

European archaeologists know little about archaeology and protection of cultural heritage in Cuba. The economic blockade that was forced upon Cuba by the USA has been, amongst other factors, the cause of this. This isolation has been maintained for many years after the political, economic and social changes that were introduced in this society after the 1959 Revolution. Only through personal enquiry has information become available on the interesting work that has been done in Cuba. In this context it is possible to point out two meetings that took place recently, the "First Symposium of Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage" held in Havana last June and the "Third Local Conference of Researchers of the Archaeological Heritage" which also took place last year.

This interest in preserving the archaeological heritage was raised through the efforts of Cuban archaeologists and was confirmed at an official level by the promulgation of the Laws in 1977. Whereas only eight museums existed