

THE FUTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Edited by

Gary M. Feinman

T. Douglas Price

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Preface

T. DOUGLAS PRICE

Archaeology is a great vocation. I love what I do—the travel, fascinating places, quirky colleagues, inquisitive students, and mysteries of the past. What could be better? In fact, there are several things that could be better and this collection of essays on the future of archaeology is intended to provide some sense of need and direction to the field. Archaeology has a great deal to offer both practitioners and society at large and I hope my comments will be taken as suggestions for improvement, as they are intended.

One of the major difficulties in archaeology relates to the funding of research. Archaeology is not cheap and is becoming more expensive every year as new scientific methods are added to our toolkit. Radiocarbon dates cost more than \$500.00 each; ancient DNA is very expensive. Excavation costs more and more and involves housing, transportation, food, and many other expenses. Needed laboratory equipment costs tens of thousands of dollars. But despite all of this there are relatively few funding sources available for archaeology. Large projects need the kind of money that is available only at the National Science Foundation, which has a budget of approximately \$9 million per year (equivalent to what most small countries in Europe provide for doing archaeology) for pure research. Substantial money is available for developer-funded projects such as road construction and land development, but in general the amount of money available is very limited. Somehow more substantial funding needs to be made available for archaeological research.

This of course raises the question of the value of such research. Archaeology is clearly a humanity and contributes to our knowledge of the past, but archaeology is also a science and the necessary instruments and laboratory technicians are not cheap. U.S. archaeologists work in all parts of the world and in almost every time period. To not provide the funding that is necessary for this research is in fact a tragic part of American science. Philip Morrison (1915–2005) was an American physicist and one of the youngest participants in the Manhattan Project, before withdrawing from weapons research to focus on a prolific writing and teaching career at MIT. Morrison thought that archaeology was an important part of the human curriculum and combined science and human studies in a way that is rarely seen in academia. The importance and value of archaeology is discussed in many of the chapters in this volume.

For years I have been lobbying for a separation of archaeology from anthropology in the U.S. academic world. Archaeology is a field unto itself and can contribute to and learn from anthropology, but it should be recognized on its own as a distinct social science with specific goals, needs, and aspirations. Ar-

archaeology is beginning to understand aspects of human society and change and archaeologists need to develop these perspectives themselves in the context of archaeological data. Archaeology is a separate department or institute in most places in the world, and in these places it is larger and much more successful than its U.S. counterpart. As a separate department, archaeology would have much more opportunity for growth, for development, for fundraising, and for public attention.

Fieldwork is an essential and critical part of what we do. It's a reality check, a very important part of understanding what archaeology can tell us. And what is available? I have always insisted that my students spend as much time as possible doing fieldwork. From my own fieldwork I have learned both the limitations and the knowledge that archaeology can contribute. We must ask questions that can be answered.

One of the characteristics of much of archaeology is that finds must be of great importance. This is necessary for publication, recognition, promotion, grants, and money to continue operations, but at the same time it makes it very difficult for archaeologists to place their finds in a larger context. Everything must be the first, the oldest, or very unique. Because of this problem it is often difficult to be confident that what has been found and described is in fact what was actually present. What are the most important aspects of finds and our work? We need to concentrate on variation to attempt to define that variation and determine the limits of our concepts or units of analysis. Attempts to find the oldest, biggest, largest, or first are not helping to resolve the questions of variability and change in past human societies. We don't need the biggest or the oldest; we need the usual, the common, and the normal to determine how our human species evolved.

A final suggestion is that archaeologists should be trained in a variety of fields. We cannot depend upon geneticists or geologists or radiocarbon specialists from other fields to fully understand our data and the inherent problems with it. Archaeologists should also be trained in genetics, geology, zoology, botany, and many other fields that are related to what archaeologists study. I believe this is the only way that we will resolve issues of dissimilarity in interpretation between disciplines. Just as it takes years to train archaeologists, it may take years to train these needed specialists—but the need for them is obvious.

Having said all this, I want to reiterate that my feelings about archaeology are very positive and that my comments here are intended only as a potential aid to improving our discipline. I feel very privileged to have enjoyed a career as an archaeologist.

I also am grateful to my colleagues and friends who made this volume possible. Eliot Werner, our publisher, has been a longtime ally and Gary Feinman and I are grateful to him for taking on this role. Eliot also did yeoman's work helping to edit the essays in this collection. Thanks also are due the contributors for their willingness to share their insights and aims.

Introduction

GARY M. FEINMAN

Archaeology has been through a series of crises and changes in its recent history (perhaps, like growing pains, reflective of the discipline's marked expansion during the mid- to late twentieth century). While the richness and global diversity of our findings have exploded, many of the field's challenges remain unresolved. These include the dialectic between history and science and between processual and post-processual archaeology, as well as the empirical challenges of new scientific and technological revolutions. I think it is high time for a consideration of where archaeology is and, more especially, where it's going.

On a personal level, I find too little emphasis today on archaeology as a deeply held passion that affords grand opportunities to vision other places and times. I also worry about the future of our discipline in terms of the importance of science and an appreciation for the basic facts and realities of humanity's past. At the same time, archaeology (perhaps having survived adolescence) is on the cusp of major discoveries, contributions, and important theoretical developments that will make us a far more relevant discipline in the academy—the only field that can chart the material foundations of a truly global and deep-time human history.

The future of archaeology will depend on how we as practitioners respond to the global and national challenges at hand and shifts in society at large, but also on what questions archaeologists choose to address; how we frame our findings; and what archaeology contributes of significance to researchers in adjacent disciplines, diverse publics, and the modern world. To realize our aims for a wider role that leverages what archaeologists have learned, a bit of an exercise in self-reflection seems to be in order. This series of short essays on the future of archaeology, written by a cadre of scholars with different interests and at different stages in their careers, is an appropriate and opportune way to consider where we are as a field and where we are going.

A sourcebook of which I served as co-editor (Feinman and Price, 2001) took stock of the discipline at the turn of the millennium, and the response to that volume was rewarding. Those essays were longer treatises that synthesized findings and outlined what the authors saw as core questions at the time. Now, a quarter-century later, reconsidering the state of the discipline, its subsequent breakthroughs and challenges, might be a means of inspiring incoming generations to consider the relevance and importance of what we do.

Certainly, the globalization of communication means that archaeology in the future will be more interconnected, coherent, and tied to cognate fields, yet

also more cross-culturally relevant and diverse in both the practitioners and their areal foci. The individuals represented here who have agreed to speak to the state of the discipline and its future highlight seemingly disparate trends, which they channel to offer their guidance and influence to shape archaeology's present and future. This volume is organized to feature a diversity of short essays with differing aims and emphases. Through these texts one can see various visions for archaeology's future. Yet at the same time there also are evident parallels and concordances that course through the chapters.

Perhaps the most recurrent observation among these authors is that history does matter since it serves as a structural foundation for the present and future. Archaeology is critical to building and widening the lenses of that history; our investigations reveal a record that is temporally deeper, more inclusive, and truly global compared with any other discipline. Knowing the diversity of the past illustrates that the human career has not been teleological, inevitable, or linear.

A fuller archive of the past and long-term sequences of change in earlier social networks and worlds also enhances our record and knowledge of what endured, what was sustainable, what collapsed, and the degree to which past practices were equitable or not. People have always made their histories and as a species we maintain the capacity to shape (if not fully make) our futures. As a species, we can accomplish incredible things—but generally such achievements take sustained cooperation, trust, and commitments of time and work. Because we know the outcomes of past social experiments and institutional arrangements, we can draw lessons both from past missteps and from episodes of enlightened times. Humanity's career is an array of forking, yet often interconnected, paths (with apologies to Borges 2018). The more pathways we document and begin to understand, the better chance we can define and recognize what might be called the “rhymes and rhythms of history,” the patterns and trends that help warn us of arrangements to avoid and others to consider.

On a personal level, I feel extremely fortunate to have spent my adult life in archaeology—to travel widely and get to know people and places globally, to work collaboratively, closely, and in long-term associations with teams of dedicated colleagues (including my wife), and to learn more about how our modern world came to be. These opportunities have been personally enlightening and frankly great fun, but they also have made me rather skeptical of many of the simple answers and categorical assertions that long have been the basis for “conventional wisdom.” Archaeologists around the world are collecting the information that is challenging these conventional narratives. Despite the tsunami of new data, however, there seems to be a reluctance in archaeology—as in other fields—to challenge entrenched paradigms (Kozlov 2023). Let us join with our colleagues across the academy to devise new conceptual armatures that eschew the centuries-old pendulum swings that have plagued the framing of the past between idiosyncratic particularism and unilinear constructs, thereby enabling us to relate fuller narratives concerning humanity's career.

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