

Eyewitness to Discovery: First-Person Accounts of More than Fifty of the World's Greatest Archaeological Discoveries, edited by Brian M. Fagan, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996, x + 493 pages. \$39.95 cloth.

Review by

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"Archaeology is a priceless, dispassionate eye into the past, for the artifacts of ancient times provide a telling record of human behavior, of the ways in which different members of a society negotiated with one another and coped with prevailing conditions. In the final analysis, the human past is not just a record of rulers and statesmen going about their business.... It is a record of continual, ever changing interactions between people, rich and poor, important and humble.... The challenge for the archaeologist is to reconstruct and understand the past using only the durable and surviving remains of ancient behavior." (pp. 72-73).

Readers will find in this impressive volume some familiar discoveries—such as the Tollund Man, Tutankhamun's tomb, the royal cemetery at Ur, and the Sutton Hoo ship burial—and some less familiar—the Nubian kings of Kerma, a Bronze Age town in Gournia, Crete, and the Princess of Khok Phanom Di in Thailand. It is a splendid assortment of selections, most of them written by the discoverers themselves. A world map and a chronological chart place the discoveries in space and time. Each selection has an excellent introduction by Fagan, with biographical details, historical background, and archaeological significance. Some of the selections are quite technical or complex (Boucher de Perthes and Raymond Dart, for example), others, like those by the Leakeys and by Johanson in the opening section on human origins, or Arthur Evans on the palace of Knossos, are lively and dramatic. Selections span the whole history of archaeology, from Thomas Jefferson and John Lloyd Stephens to Mortimer Wheeler and George Bass. There are seven groups of selections, arranged geographically, and a final section, "Archaeology Becomes a Science," in which Fagan discusses archaeology's progress from looting or digging for entertainment (a Victorian habit) through the significant innovations of Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers to the carefully planned and technically performed excavations of today's multidisciplinary teams of experts. He notes that today "archaeological discoveries come as much from the laboratory as from the spade" (p. 427).

There is a generous assortment of illustrations, most of them of work in progress or important objects found. The dozen portraits of archaeologists tell us little, however, and the space could better have been used for some maps, cross sections, and diagrams, which are much needed in following the more complex accounts, such as those of Kathleen Kenyon on the walls of Jericho and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma on the Aztec Temple Mayor. There are a few illustrations in color, one of which seems to be the wrong picture. It shows a battle scene from the murals of the Maya temple of Bonampak, but the text describes in detail the subsequent "arraignment", with frightened prisoners' fingers dripping blood and a severed head lying on the temple steps—this scene is on the wall opposite the battle mural.

Although archaeologists have long been fascinated by the richly furnished graves of royalty and elite personages, Fagan includes only eight accounts of such discoveries, and like other selections, they illustrate the changing techniques and purposes of archaeological research. It is not surprising that Old World discoveries outnumber New World ones, but possible bias is suggested when Fagan cites Mortimer Wheeler's role in initiating "the first truly modern" archaeology in the 1920s and overlooks a contemporary innovator, A. V. Kidder. But in general Fagan's encyclopedic archaeological knowledge and his keen insights into the significance of such research as the 19th century investigation of Zimbabwe or the 1990's Ice Man of the Tyrolean Alps, make this volume valuable for what it can tell both the lay and professional reader about the past and present of archaeology. There are selections for every taste and the book is a pleasure to browse in

or read from cover to cover. It will be long before it is matched for its world-wide breadth of selections with their informed introductory discussions.

Rediscovering Antiquity: Karl Weber and the Excavation of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae, by C.C. Parslow, 1995, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

by

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Rediscovering Antiquity is an example of the genre of historical writing which seeks to recast the careers of little-known figures who have fallen into obscurity. This is typically intended to move them and their work into the proper "lineage," that is, the select group of ancestral figures from which modern practices are derived. Parslow is interested in the 18th century excavations of the Vesuvian cities, which, he argues, have been misunderstood by historians of archaeology. Indeed, common sources, such as Daniel (1981: 55), describe the initial explorations of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae, sponsored by the Bourbon kings of Naples, as "...treasure hunts and not serious excavations." While the Roman artifacts removed from the sites are credited with spurring interest in antiquity in Enlightenment Europe, modern scholars have until now devoted little attention to the means through which they were recovered.

In attempting to rectify this situation Parslow focuses on Karl Jacob Weber (1712-1764), a Swiss officer and military engineer in the Neapolitan Royal Guard. Weber was made assistant to Rocque Joaquin de Alcubierre, director of the excavations at Herculaneum, in 1750, and for the next 13 years planned and conducted excavations there and at Pompeii and Stabiae under Alcubierre's direction. Weber died in 1764, his health shattered by the exigencies of the job. Given Alcubierre's 42 years in charge of the excavations and the involvement of various others before and afterward, Weber's tenure might be seen as a minor episode in a work lasting generations; but Parslow sees his activities as foreshadowing important developments. "Weber established the first truly systematic approach to the excavations," he writes, "anticipating, in the process, the scientific methodologies of modern archaeology" (3).

In the process of describing Weber's career, Parslow provides what may be the most detailed discussion of the Bourbon excavations in the English language. His discussion ranges from the earliest excavations at Herculaneum, sponsored by the Duke D'Elbeuf following 1709, through the efforts of Alcubierre's successor Francesco La Vega, towards the end of the 18th century. The intricate system which grew up around the procurement and interpretation of the Vesuvian antiquities is depicted in detail. The prestige of the court of Charles of Bourbon was heavily invested in the archaeological finds of the vicinity, and the project was overseen by the Prime Minister. Direct responsibility for the antiquities was shared by the director of the Museum Herculanense, the superintendent of the excavations, and the Real Academia Ercolanese di Archeologia, who were usually bitter rivals for royal favor. Subordinate officials such as Weber were thus subject to competing interests in their efforts to conduct the excavations. The technical aspects of the project were also daunting, since the tunnels through which most of the work was conducted were prone to collapse, dusty, poorly ventilated, and occasionally filled with noxious fumes. All of the project supervisors appear to have had health problems associated with their work, from which the probable fate of the workers who excavated the tunnels can be surmised. Many were forced laborers, and the opportunity to augment income by selling artifacts on the side was probably diminished by the fact that those accused of "stealing" antiquities were subject to torture and imprisonment (208).