

Chapter 1

Archaeology and Contemporary Society: Archaeological Heritage, a “Treasure” Under Our Feet – What Archaeology Is by Two Points of View

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ABSTRACT

Two eminent archaeologists write, according to each of their own experiences and opinions, an annotated history of archaeology, and its relationship with society and in the development of its own concept. Both of the authors have performed high public duties in research institutes or institutional bodies which has given them a privileged point of observation on dynamics in recent decades. Finding their texts side by side in this chapter, the reader can easily form personal ideas on what is archaeology, what it has been, and how it evolved to its current situation. The authors lead the reader along two paths in the discipline and give light to scientific positions and thoughts, in some cases with a taste of polemics.

INTRODUCTION

A communication that claims to be correct and effective cannot ignore the specific knowledge of the subject on which it wants to be applied, of its history, its problems, the scientific and cultural debate in progress.

Since, evidently, each book communicates, and especially considering that this one is dedicated to the development of effective communication tools to be offered to archaeology, it is therefore useful to trace, at the beginning, some simple lines that may help a reader less expert in the specific sector of

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archaeology to orient him/ herself within it. In this way, he / she will then be able to examine with some more competences, or information, all the other contents presented in the following chapters.

Above all, some aspects are presented here, with a pair of point of view. The relationship between archaeology and society. The historical roots of passion, or interest, for ancient things. Both the common perception that the latter has about the first one and the historical development of the approaches to archaeology, especially in Italy but not only, by politicians, legislators and archaeologists themselves.

How was this made? Even archaeology, like every aspect of human knowledge, is subject to philosophies, interpretations, currents of thought, points of view. One way to escape from the bonds of every bias can be, as it has been, to entrust separately to two authors, distinguished by curriculum and nationality, a free and personal treatment of the subject.

Their contributions are presented in strict alphabetical order.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Two commonplace but intertwined observations can be a good starting point: the first is the strong gap between the profession of archaeologist and the perception of archaeology by our contemporaries; the second is the multiplicity of facets of the profession of archaeologist.

Screens and Ditches

For many contemporaries, the archaeologist is not the one who seeks but the one who finds: he is the man of the discoveries. There can be interest in him but what attracts is the novelty, the scoop: an event that will take us out of the daily routine. The archaeologist is a discoverer but he can also appear as a controller, a guardian of heritage, inflexible; a policeman, by whom not the scandal arrives but the archaeological “risk”; the one who will delay or even prohibit a project, a transformation. The one who shows the limits of private property by reminding that the heritage belongs to everyone, regardless of where it is and the legal nature of the land.

The beginner in archaeology is sometimes conditioned by this external view of the archaeologist as an Indiana Jones but he quickly realizes that this path is not the right one. He discovers the rigor, the need to assimilate a complex knowledge but also the ambiguity of the fieldwork: in appearance a fun and playful entertainment, in fact a test that requires physical commitment and method.

There is certainly a big gap between the various activities of the archaeologist: the trainer who teaches at universities; the official who is in charge of a territory; the museum curator who must manage his collections, animate, communicate with visitors; the researcher who, like any researcher, tries to renew methods and develop new interpretations. Not to mention the “infantryman” of preventive archaeology who is in the front line and must deal with emergencies in sometimes difficult weather conditions and with strong time constraints. Strong discrepancies that slow down the necessary mobility between the trades. Some may, or must do, several things at once: an intellectual asset but also an additional constraint.

So, there are multiple screens that offend the vision of archaeology and archaeology. There is the outside and the inside, the daydreamed and the lived.

The archaeologist has a predecessor who was “the antiquary” (a word that has another meaning today with a mercantile dimension) that is to say a scholar who was passionate about Antiquities and who committed his personal fortune to satisfy his passion (Schnapp, 1993). Still there are, rare. They participate

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