

ARCHAEOLOGY

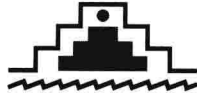
Discovering Our Past

SECOND EDITION

ROBERT J. SHARER

WENDY ASHMORE





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On the cover: An excavation of a royal tomb at Sipán, Peru. (See the Introduction for more information on this Moche tomb.) Photograph by Bill Ballenberg, © 1988 National Geographic Society.

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PREFACE

To many people, archaeology is especially fascinating. This book explores some of the reasons for that fascination: It explains what archaeologists do in their work, how they conduct research, and how they use the results to reconstruct the past.

In the following pages, we survey the techniques, methods, and theoretical frameworks of contemporary archaeology, with an emphasis on prehistoric archaeology, the discipline that focuses on the vast era of the human past before the dawn of history. In doing so, we have approached archaeology in a way that sets this book apart from others dealing with the same topic:

- In our presentation we view prehistoric archaeology as an integral part of the larger field of anthropology, conditioned by the historical development, concepts, and goals of its parent discipline.
- We treat the evolving perspectives of archaeological method and theory, together with their implications for understanding the prehistoric past, from a balanced scientific and humanistic perspective. The text is not a manifesto for any single doctrine or “school” within the field. Rather, it seeks to integrate those aspects of the more traditional and the recent innovative approaches that have contributed significantly to current archaeological understanding, including culture historical, cultural processual, and postprocessual approaches to studying the past.
- The text’s organization reflects that of actual archaeological research. As in research, we begin on an abstract level, from the formulation of an idea or problem that stimulates research in the first place, and proceed to the more concrete steps of finding, manipulating, and describing the physical remains of past human activity. Finally, we go back to the abstract with the interpretation of the data in light of the original research questions and problems.
- In considering the research process, we keep a clear focus on the role of archaeology in the day-to-day world. Ours is not the “ivory tower” profession many think it is, and this point is underscored most forcefully in the opening and concluding chapters, which describe the major ethical, intellectual, and practical challenges to archaeology today and some of the ways these challenges are being met.
- As further evidence of archaeology’s role in modern life, we present essays by our colleagues that relate incidents and issues from their per-

sonal perspectives. These essays, called “Archaeologists at Work,” illustrate some of the points made in the text discussion from a fresh viewpoint, but also vividly demonstrate the varied lives and experiences that are part of a contemporary career in archaeology.

- Throughout the text we integrate generalized discussions of archaeological method and theory with actual case studies and examples from archaeological research around the world. We have elected to present a mix of detailed and relatively brief case studies and, when appropriate, we reintroduce the same example to illustrate later discussions. Extended consideration is given to recent field investigations at the Classic Maya site of Copán, Honduras, where each of us has been privileged to direct and collaborate in a multifaceted and truly exciting ongoing research effort.
- Throughout the book we stress two crucial themes. First, material remains providing a link with past societies are a finite and nonrenewable resource and should not be disturbed simply for weekend entertainment—let alone for monetary profit. Much knowledge can be gained from these remains, but only if they are handled with expert care. Second, the ways to study archaeological remains are varied, and an archaeologist’s choice will depend on what he or she wants to know. Selecting one site over another, or one field method over another, is always a decision that follows from the specified research goals in each particular situation. The most useful skills an archaeologist can have are clear reasoning and incisive decision-making; these are far more important than an ability to wield a pick or a trowel.

We wish to emphasize that this book is not intended to be a blueprint for digging. Instead, we offer a review of what archaeology is today, how it developed over the years as a scientific and humanistic discipline, and how modern archaeology has allowed us to discover our human past from the material traces our ancestors left behind. In describing methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, we have tried to indicate criteria for choosing between one approach and another in specific situations. But there is much more to archaeology than digging, and the reader should not expect simply to take this (or any) book in one hand, a trowel in the other, and attempt to excavate or conduct any other kind of archaeological investigation. A textbook cannot substitute for active field participation and learning under the guidance of an experienced professional archaeologist.

AUDIENCE

The book is intended primarily for introductory college courses in archaeological method and theory. It is flexible enough to be useful also as a reference in introductory graduate-level method and theory courses. And because the organization follows the conduct of research, the text can

easily be used in archaeological field schools to accompany the actual practice of field archaeology.

Depending on the course, this text can be complemented by books offering an outline of world prehistory, by manuals covering the more technical aspects of field methods, and/or by sets of selected readings amplifying discussion of the various topics covered here. We have, in part, geared our bibliography to include selections from standard readers to facilitate course organization, as well as to make it easier for students to locate supplementary materials. With its emphasis on archaeological reasoning and decision-making, this book can also be productively paired with any of several available workbooks, in which a series of exercises allows students to practice the kinds of reasoning they have learned from the text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND GLOSSARY

The bibliography is designed to introduce the newcomer to the archaeological literature; it thus provides a key to the huge library available on studies of the human past. Since no bibliography can hope to be comprehensive, we have tended to favor recent works and, whenever possible, publications that explicitly review relevant antecedent literature, while still including selected “classic” works. At the same time, we have tried to present varied positions in theoretical debates.

Bibliographic references are summarized topically at the end of each chapter in a “Guide to Further Reading.” Full citation information for all references is given in the bibliography at the end of the book.

We have also included a glossary of key terms that includes references to the chapters where these concepts are discussed. Terms in the glossary are in boldface in the text.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One never writes alone, and certainly we have been helped by many people in many ways during the writing of this book and its several predecessors. The first version, called *Fundamentals of Archaeology* (Benjamin/Cummings, 1979), originally grew out of the senior author’s introductory archaeology method and theory course taught at the University of Pennsylvania. The students in this course were the first inspiration—as well as the first critics—and students in subsequent courses taught by both of us have continued to shape our ways of explaining how archaeologists discover the past.

When we moved to Mayfield to revise the original book, Janet M. Beatty enthusiastically assumed the role of sponsoring editor. Through two editions of this book, plus an abridged version, Jan has persistently pushed, praised, cajoled, and exhorted us onward. She has truly become

our friend, as well as our editor. A number of other friends and colleagues read and criticized the manuscript at various stages; their advice may not always have been followed, but it was always considered and appreciated. Many others kindly allowed us to use photos and drawings from their research to help illustrate this text. And we thank Julia C. Miller, doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, for making all this possible by putting the previous edition on disk.

We acknowledge specifically the comments and suggestions for this edition received from several anonymous reviewers and from Sarah Campbell (Western Washington University), Paul Farnsworth (Louisiana State University), Kenneth L. Feder (Central Connecticut University), Gary M. Feinman (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Susan D. Gillespie (University of Illinois), Michael Love (Stanford University), Scott Madry (Rutgers University), Patty Jo Watson (Washington University), and Richard W. Yerkes (The Ohio State University).

We are also grateful to the colleagues who contributed the personal essays that enrich the narrative: Ronald L. Bishop (Smithsonian Institution), Robert J. Blumenschine (Rutgers University), Margaret W. Conkey (University of California, Berkeley), Lynne Goldstein (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), Steven A. LeBlanc (Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, and Mimbres Foundation), David W. Sedat (The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania), Payson D. Sheets (University of Colorado), and Patty Jo Watson (Washington University). Special thanks go to Kent V. Flannery (University of Michigan), who kindly allowed us to do severe bodily damage to his thoroughly enjoyable final chapter from *Guila Naquitz* (Academic Press, 1986), that provides the essay after Chapter 3.

We extend deep appreciation to colleagues in the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAAH) and the Proyecto Arqueológico Copán, who have supported our research at Copán and who, over the years, have generously shared with us information, guidance, and friendship. Their contributions are most readily apparent in Chapter 5, but collaboration with them has also had more general and sometimes quite profound effects on our thinking about the conduct of archaeological research. We would especially like to thank the several recent Directors of the IHAAH, Dr. Adan Cueva, Lic. Ricardo Agurcia F., Lic. Victor Cruz R., and the current Director, Arq. José Maria Casco L., as well as respected colleagues who have directed various aspects of Copán research in the last two decades, Ricardo Agurcia F., E. Wyllys Andrews V., Claude F. Baudéz, William and Barbara Fash, Carlos Rudy Larios V., Richard M. Leventhal, William T. Sanders, David W. Sedat, David L. Webster, and Gordon R. Willey.

There is one colleague whom the senior author came to know as a friend for far too short a time. Conversations with Glynn Isaac, just before his premature death in 1985, resulted in fundamental contributions to the discussions of the interpretation of the archaeological record found throughout this book. We include a photograph of Glynn in this book as an illustration for the discussion of reconstructing ancient behavior from

the distribution of artifacts and ecofacts at Koobi Fora (Figure 12.2, p. 404)—one of the many endeavors in which he made substantial contributions to archaeology.

We would like to thank the professional staff at Mayfield Publishing Company for bringing the current edition to fruition. We are especially grateful to senior editor Jan Beatty, as well as to production editor Lynn Rabin Bauer, marketing manager Debby Horowitz, and associate designer Jean Mailander for their creativity, perseverance, patience, diplomacy, and good humor. Copy editor Carole R. Crouse gently corrected our grammar and offered helpful suggestions about how to say more clearly what we really meant.

We extend renewed thanks to our families for supporting us during all phases of this endeavor. And we thank each other, too, for intellectual stimulation, mutual respect and support, and a sturdy collegial friendship. As with earlier instances of writing and revising, we didn't always agree, but even the arguments were ultimately rewarding and often fun. We hope the result will stimulate others to think more—as we certainly continue to do—about the issues and choices raised in these pages.

The record of the human past is undeniably fascinating. But it is also very fragile. As in previous editions, we dedicate this book to those who may learn to be committed to studying and protecting our past heritage for the benefits of the future.



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