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SPREADING THE WORD

Some Ideas on Publication and Education

by

Edward S. Rutsch

The need to record complex data for future analysis is inherent in science. Man learns and advances because he is guided by the cumulative experience of his ancestors and brothers. Especially in archaeology must we record our methodology and findings, because every excavator of cultural remains destroys a large percent of the available information as he digs. The anthropologist can better understand the culture history of the people he studies if he can compare his data with those from sites of similar cultures. This chance to synthesize material is lost if the data are not recorded and made available through publication.

Field record keeping is, of course, essential, for without it the final published record is valueless. After these initial data have been gathered accurately, a guide for the publication is suggested. What I have done effectively is plan my publication as well as I can before I begin to dig. For example, if map analysis is necessary, I write a report of the maps concerned complete with photos, which can become part of the final report. If each such task is thus followed through during the research, the final paper can be prepared for publication by careful editing and updating.

I suggest the following plan for the archaeologist. First, he must state clearly and incisively the problem to which he will apply archaeological methodologies. Potentially solvable problems are the only reason for anyone to dig. All excavation has a purpose; anyone who digs "because it is there" had better climb mountains instead. Next should follow a complete explanation of excavation methodologies, which may prove invaluable to a researcher using this work in the future. Careful and clear description and illustration are musts. No matter what his colleagues think of his problems, methods, and conclusions, only the archaeologist can properly describe and illustrate his findings. This is the crux of the excavator's burden. Even if his problem is unanswerable and his excavations provide only negative results, he must record what he found before it is lost forever. If new sites and excavations do not leave him time for the preparation of such reports, the archaeologist should stop digging; and if he hasn't the confidence to publish, he shouldn't dig at all.

Finally, the archaeologist must analyze what he has found and make all possible relevant conclusions. Raw data can be used many ways in scientific analysis, but they will prove useless unless a proper problem has been stated, a careful record of the excavation is available, and a thorough analysis of findings has been made.

Often, a site proves to present a larger problem than was originally supposed. After a digging season in which only part of a site was excavated, the archaeologist may be tempted to postpone publication until completion of all excavation. At some point, the value of reporting works in progress rather than completed work will help him decide to publish. Sometimes newsletters, rather than journals, of learned societies can handle this sort of publication.

As editor of the *Bulletin of the Archeological Society of New Jersey*, I can say that carefully worked up manuscripts are always in demand and need never go begging. State, regional, and national historical archaeological associations all solicit manuscripts and will help the author with editorial problems. A good point to consider along with my suggestion of planning the publication early is planning where it could be published. The organization sponsoring the work should be apprised of expenses and any other publication problems from the start. While digging is in process, they may find the energy to set up their own publication. A warning about private or local publication is that such distribution of the work may not be extensive enough to reach others in the field who are awaiting published data.

Education must start with the archaeologist and his crew. American field crews most often contain regular students or student volunteers interested in learning the mysteries of field work. After the leader-worker contract is understood, the laborer will be rewarded by learning new skills. If the diggers are professional laborers, they still need training for maximum usefulness.

In most cases, the work a new excavator is doing will be the first real scientific research in which he has participated. American high school and college students generally do not have the opportunity to do more than textbook experiments in science classes. The thrill that students experience when handling primary sources for the first time is very gratifying to a teacher and is an opportunity for expanding young minds that should not be missed.

Students must understand the problem for digging. Allowing them to share in new problems and in the reasons for changes in plans seldom leads to negative results and has often produced fresh, valuable ideas. Following the field session, students should have the chance to work in the lab. No archaeologist is ever made in the field. It is in the analyses of artifacts and records conducted in the laboratory that archaeology students conceptualize a model of the culture they are studying.

Education must extend beyond the research team to the organization and community at large. This public education work might just as well be termed interpretation, or selling research schemes. The critic may ask, "Why bother to do this time-consuming work? The public does not or will not understand and certain-

ly does not care." These fallacious comments one often hears are frequently cover-ups for those people who are unable to answer the questions and make people care. If we wish for public support, and most of us seek it, we must sell our ideas and methods to the public.

We have an advantage in that our colleagues who dig in the exotic sites of early man and the classic world have spread an aura of mystery and interest in archaeology through long and colorful press coverage. We can take advantage of this natural curiosity about our mysteries and build upon it. The best place to do the spade work is with school children and visitors to the site. Taking time to present a report of the dig to school children is a remarkably rewarding endeavor. The visitor, if planned for, will take time and effort to be handled properly, but the results can be very satisfying. On the other hand, if he is treated as an unwelcome interloper, he will be easily added to a list of people disenchanted by their contacts with scientists.

This public education work can be accomplished without harming the quality of the research, and it will help the project to be accepted and supported. In addition, the archaeologist has a first-hand chance to discourage pot hunting and bottle collecting, and to develop community understanding of the special value of good archaeological research.

Another educational tool is the press, which continually finds archaeology to be "good copy." Newspapers can be handled best by contacting them early in the season, preparing press releases containing solid facts and the concepts to be stressed, and having a bit of luck. If treated in a friendly manner, the press will usually be positive in its report. The archaeologist should do his best but should not over-react to the inevitable inaccuracies in news coverage of his project.

Publishing and education are responsibilities that the archaeologist must accept and accomplish as best he can. His findings should never be shared exclusively among a few professionals, for depicting past cultures to the people as accurately as possible should always be his goal.