

In the last issue of the Journal,¹ Mr. John Piet discussed some problems and methods in Middle Eastern archaeology. As far as I can determine from the rather confusing article, Mr. Piet is making a plea for the widespread practice of good archaeological techniques, a cause I fully support. Mr. Piet also points out the narrowness of vision which causes the art historian and philologist to neglect the work of the field archaeologist. I think that Mr. Piet, pre-occupied with Palestinian archaeology, has neglected much good archaeology done by other than the "Kenyon" school.

There are many archaeologists digging in the Middle East whose field techniques are impeccable and whose training was gotten under other directors than Miss Kenyon; Professor Donald Hansen of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, Dr. Cuyler Young of the University of Toronto and Dr. Oscar Muscarella of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, are three archaeologists whose excellent work comes to mind.² A season with one of these men, or any number of others of equal caliber, would be as valuable an experience for the incipient archaeologist as a season with Miss Kenyon.

Since transportation to the Middle East is very expensive, and excavation budgets are invariably too small,

¹ Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University I (1968), pp. 11-18.

² There are also "Classical" archaeologists, such as Dr. Homer Thompson, Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton, who has ably directed the Athenian Agora excavations, who use the "stratigraphical" approach.

there are scant funds available to take inexperienced field workers as crew members.³ However, one need not travel to the East to gain a good foundation in field techniques. There are many opportunities for field experience in the United States. Not only does Columbia University have its own field course, but so do several other schools in the New York vicinity. In addition, there are excavations sponsored by museums and universities in many parts of the United States. Although the remains of American Indian civilizations may not stir the imagination of a student passionate about the Middle East, he may nevertheless learn how to draw stratigraphic sections and pottery profiles, to establish a zero point, to distinguish different living levels, to keep a field notebook, and to restore crushed ceramics. Any field experience puts a student in a better position to find an excavation which can include him on its staff. Unless the student has personal funds to send himself to exotic places (many excavations will feed and house a student if he can provide his own transportation), a local field course is a good first step towards field experience in the East.

Digging by natural stratigraphical levels has been practiced in New World archaeology since early in this century and is not the unique property of Miss Kenyon in the Middle East, as Mr. Piet would imply. I commend to anyone interested in the problems of field archaeology An Introduction to Prehistoric Archeology, by Frank Hole and Robert F. Heizer (New York, 1965). Their section on stratigraphy not only includes the theoretical considerations and practical problems of excavation methods but also gives a thorough history of the development of the stratigraphical approach.

There is another point in Mr. Piet's article which provokes comment. He suggests that a thorough book-knowledge of ceramic sequences can increase one's effective observation in the field. This may sometimes be true, but a reliance on established sequences to determine pits, etc. may lead one to ignore the actual situation, for established

³ The Ford Foundation is the only organization to provide funds on a large scale to encourage field archaeology. The grants, which were instituted last year, are generous, but insufficient to provide every interested archaeology student with a place on an excavation. Even if additional funds were available for transportation and student support, there would likely be too few excavations to absorb all the students, for many excavations cannot support large staffs due to local economic, political and other reasons.

ceramic sequences are often modified.⁴ In field archaeology, the truth is in the objects themselves in the actual context in which they are found and not in an external opinion of what should be.

Mr. Piet suggests that a "basic question" which must be answered is "whether everything should be excavated meticulously, or whether once the fundamental facts have been learned things can proceed apace."⁵ I suggest that there is no alternative to meticulous excavation. What we in 1969 consider irrelevant facts may be found in 2069 to tell volumes about ancient life. Since all excavation is destruction of information, we must provide for ourselves and future scholars the means to reconstruct a site in all possible details. To "proceed apace" after "fundamental facts" have been learned is only a sophisticated form of treasure hunting, however much the political, economic, and personal realities of our world may be invoked to rationalize summary excavation.

⁴ I cite only one example of recently modified ceramic sequences: at Tepe Giyan in Iran a sequence was established in 1935 which in recent years has proved only partially true. See Robert H. Dyson, Jr., "The Archaeological Evidence of the Second Millennium B.C. on the Persian Plateau," The Cambridge Ancient History, fasc. 66 (New York and London, 1968), pp. 27-28.

⁵ Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University I (1968), p. 17.

JOHN PIET REPLIES:

I agree completely with the points Miss Rubinson has raised. I had attempted to state fully the sometimes conflicting "basic assumptions and theories of stratigraphic digging." The confusion Miss Rubinson says she finds in the article may result from my not stating explicitly that the basic assumptions analyzed are not those of the idealistic novice student archaeologist, but those of excavation directors whose reports and field procedures can hopefully be better understood with my article to hand. For example, I said nothing about "book-knowledge" of ceramic sequences; rather, I was speaking about the basic working principle of the Albright school of archaeologists for whom ceramic sequences are the sine qua non, and for whom refined stratigraphy is a relatively new thing. In attempting to present all responsible points of view it is inevitable that the reader will have to pick and choose. Chacun à son goût. It is interesting, however, that Miss Rubinson has not called in question the trenching method--a major point of controversy.

Unfortunately, only a fraction of the excavations in the Middle East today, not to mention Homer's Greece, maintain the standards about which Miss Rubinson and I have written.