

Preface

THE MODERN SCIENCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY did not originate as a science. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries archaeology was essentially treasure hunting.¹ Wealthy Europeans or their agents went out to Mediterranean lands and the Middle East in order to collect museum pieces and send them back home. Others made voyages of exploration to find biblical sites and in the process often collected artifacts as well. Among these travelers to the Middle East, incidentally, were a number of extraordinary women who may be seen as important predecessors of the first generation of pioneer women archaeologists. Generally, these European travelers—male and female—had no real interest in systematic excavation. Their objective was either exploration or the acquisition of antiquities.

One may see examples of this European desire for antiquities throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Thus, in 1784 the Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier wrote to L. F. S. Fauvel, his agent in Athens, “Take everything you can. Do not neglect any opportunity for looting all that is lootable in Athens and the environs. Spare neither the living nor the dead.”² Seventeen years later, in 1801, the Turkish government gave Lord Elgin permission to remove the sculptures from the Athenian acropolis and ship them to England. Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt 1798 “marked the beginning of a process of investigation and discovery in which the military authorities, scholars and art thieves of Europe would combine in unholy alliance to uncover the evidence of past civilizations.”³

Farther east, in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Claudius James Rich, an agent of the East India Company in Baghdad, visited sites in

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Mesopotamia and wrote about them. He also collected antiquities that were subsequently sold to the British Museum. His activity was sufficiently well known to attract the attention of Lord Byron, who wrote in *Don Juan*,

Claudius Rich, Esquire, some bricks has got
And written lately two memoirs upon't.

In Egypt, according to Kent Weeks,

Egyptologists, most of them philologists by training, considered archaeological data merely footnotes to the story told by the written word. Archaeology's goal, it was argued, should simply be to find more texts. Archaeological context was ignored, and objects were saved only if they were deserving of display in the museums. Excavators felt perfectly justified in plowing through sites . . . saving only inscribed objects and pieces of aesthetic appeal and tossing the rest into the Nile. It was an exciting time: excavators plundered tombs, dynamited tombs, committed piracy and shot their competitors in order to assemble great collections.⁴

In the second half of the nineteenth century this "exciting time" gave way to more sedate pursuits! Archaeology began to change from the search for treasure to the systematic excavation and study of ancient sites and of the objects, both big and small, found there. Thus, in 1860 Giuseppe Fiorelli took over the excavation at Pompeii and began to record the results of his digging. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Heinrich Schliemann (for all his brutal excavation techniques) and Wilhelm Dörpfeld kept accurate records of their fieldwork at Troy, recorded debris layers and published timely and scholarly reports of their work. In Egypt and then in Palestine W. M. Flinders-Petrie was one of the first archaeologists to dig carefully, record his results, and provide contextual analysis. Among other things, he also developed techniques for the sequential dating of pottery.

Modern, systematic archaeology began its existence as a new discipline, usually subordinated to another field. Classical archaeology, for example, was subordinate to philology within the field of classical studies. Egyptian archaeology had to emerge from under the wing of philologically oriented Egyptologists. And Near Eastern archaeology owed much of its rise to the European fascination with the Bible.

Of course, as a new discipline, not yet fully integrated into university curricula and conducted far off from university campuses, archaeology

offered women unique professional opportunities. Some of the pioneering women archaeologists did not have university appointments; many had (some) independent means. But the same can be said, incidentally, of male archaeologists of this time. Schliemann and Arthur Evans, for example, were both quite wealthy. And Schliemann did not have a regular university position.

In her introduction Margaret Root distinguishes two generations of early female archaeologists: those born from around the middle of the nineteenth century to about 1890 and those born between 1890 and 1940. This distinction is a useful one because, among other things, it calls attention to the fact that the earliest women archaeologists were becoming active in the field just when modern archaeology—as we know it—was beginning to emerge. As Root's introduction and the various biographies make clear, archaeology opened up new opportunities but also presented new challenges for women. Thus, the first woman archaeologist (chronologically) in this book, Jane Dieulafoy, excavated the palace of Xerxes at Susa with her husband Marcel in 1884–86. This was, in fact, the first great European archaeological expedition at Susa. And Esther Van Deman, working in Italy in the first part of the twentieth century, became a pioneer in the field of Roman construction techniques by focusing on objects as small as bricks. She was also one of the first archaeologists to exploit the potential of photography.

This, very briefly, is the background to the growth and development of archaeology in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is also the background to the exploits and accomplishments of the women whose lives are profiled in this book. Their lives may serve as models both for those interested in gender studies and for the history of archaeology; in fact, they were pioneers both as women and as archaeologists.

Breaking Ground presents twelve fascinating women whose contributions to the development and progress of Old World archaeology—in an area ranging from Italy to Mesopotamia—have been immeasurable. Our purpose is to examine the lives of these pioneer archaeologists in the early days of the discipline, tracing their path from education in the classics to travel and exploration and ultimately international recognition in the field. In this volume the reader will share in the adventures of these women pioneers. It is our hope that the courage, individualism, and professional achievement of each of them will encourage a broader appreciation of their legacy to archaeology.

The range of the contributors adds significantly to the breadth of the

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work. In some cases the bond between biographer and subject is close, the biographer having studied or worked with the archaeologist. The writer is therefore able to bring firsthand recollections to the biography. In other cases, the biographers are familiar with the body of work of the subject, but do not have firsthand knowledge. These biographers did extensive research, using primary sources such as archival materials and field notebooks. In one case the biographer is the granddaughter of her subject and herself an archaeologist, bringing to her essay an intriguing blend of family stories and professional scholarship.

We are honored that the authors accepted our invitation to write their respective biographies. Publishing the lives of these outstanding women assures that their voices will continue to be heard. These essays ask as many questions as they answer. To each of these pioneer's achievements there are caveats, but we suspect that a long list of successors will wonder with respect and admiration how these women did it at all. The success of the volume is due to the authors who entered fully into the spirit of the research, generously sharing ideas and information about their subjects.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the contribution of Margaret Cool Root. In her introductory essay, Professor Root places these archaeologists in a larger historical and social context. Sheila Cohen showed rare dedication in editing these manuscripts; we are grateful, too, to Peg Lourie for her assistance. We are also happy to acknowledge the Joukowsky Family Foundation, the Cotsen Family Foundation, and the Louise Taft Semple Fund for their generous financial support.

NOTES

1. In general see I. Morris, ed., *Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies* (Cambridge, 1994), 8–47; B. M. Fagan, ed., *Oxford Companion to Archaeology* (Oxford, 1996), s.v. “History of Archaeology”; E. M. Meyers, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (Oxford, 1997), s.v. “History of the Field”; and the extensive literature cited in each of these.

2. Quoted in W. St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free* (Oxford, 1972), 58; see also C. P. Bracken, *Antiquities Acquired* (Newton Abbot, 1975), 17; R. Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 80–81; Morris, *Classical Greece*, 24.

3. H. V. F. Winstone, *Uncovering the Ancient World* (New York, 1986), 25.

4. *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, s.v. “History of the Field: Archaeology in Egypt.”