
GUEST EDITORIAL

Communication in Archaeology

Anthony Harding

University of Exeter, UK

Natalie Venclová

Institute of Archaeology, Prague, Czech Republic

How should archaeology – its fascinations and frustrations, its discoveries and discourses, its theories and models – be communicated? What should archaeologists try to communicate, and how? To whom are they trying to communicate? Is the level of communication within archaeology or among archaeologists, sufficient? Do they, or rather, should they, communicate to their diverse audiences in the same way? And if not, how are they to decide on the best means of communication to any given audience? Is publication on the printed page the future, or will electronic media take over?

Anyone who works in present-day archaeology will have come across the difficulties of communication that beset us, whether it is with other professionals, students, the media, or the general public that one is trying to communicate. The vastness of the literature means that no one can encompass more than a fraction of what is being written or researched; one is forced to become a specialist in part or parts of the discipline, with a consequent rise of specialist terminology and lack of common language even between professionals. Communicating specialist matters to a lay audience is even more problematical.

As well as the difficulties of communicating archaeology to media outlets, to students, or to the general public, a further issue arises: that of the mode of engaging in discussion or presenting material, the *discourse*. Different archaeological communities, whether in the same or in different countries, have different types of discourse; archaeologists think and write about archaeology in such different ways that there is frequently a mismatch between what each community expects archaeological texts or presentations to contain. These problems are often more

European Journal of Archaeology Vol. 10(2–3): 117–118
Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications ISSN 1461–9571 DOI:10.1177/1461957108099813

intractable than those of simple language. And that itself is no mean problem: the world of science and academia has yet to come to terms with the question of language, whether it is one language that is to be used by all (and if so, which one), or multiple languages, which introduce their own problems of communication.

The contributions to this volume address different aspects of these questions. They are not the first that have attempted to do so, but they represent statements by a number of currently active professional practitioners in different areas of archaeological endeavour. They represent elements of sessions held at EAA Annual Meetings in 2004 (Lyon) and 2005 (Cork), with additional material solicited from other authors with the aim of creating a balanced survey of the field.

The question of language is addressed in different ways by Carver, Harding and Venclová, while the issue of discourse is a particular concern of the article by Venclová. Scherzler is particularly concerned with the presentation of archaeology in the media; this is considered too by Levy in the American context. Levy also considers various aspects of communication in American archaeology, in particular how different sectors of the public perceive archaeology and the past, and how different stakeholders are best served by the profession. In related vein, Holtorf considers different models for communicating archaeology to the public: what he calls the 'education', 'public relations' and 'democratic' models. How far are archaeologists trying to educate and enlighten their public, and if they are, are they succeeding? How far do archaeologists have a duty to involve the public in their work? And are the views of the public as important as those of the specialist? Has multivocality, in which different narratives of the past can be regarded as equally valid, brought about a permanent change in the way we view the specialist?

Carver deals especially with the future of academic publication, in particular what the role of different types of journal should be, and how the electronic revolution is going to affect archaeological publication. These are issues that are touched on by Harding too; in the view of both authors they are rapidly changing the face of archaeological publication, such that archaeologists of the future will have more need for a computer and network connection than a library. This is a matter not unique to archaeology, of course; but there are aspects of archaeological study (large format publication, the need to compare multiple illustrations, for instance) that suggest the book is not yet redundant; or is it?

We hope that these articles will stimulate debate about how archaeologists are to operate in the 21st century. Responses will be welcome, not least by the participants of the EAA sessions just mentioned who for various reasons were not involved in this volume, both as full-length articles for publication in the *EJA* (peer-reviewed) or shorter contributions to go into the EAA Newsletter, *The European Archaeologist*.