

# Editorial

Brigadier R.E.M. Wheeler, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Rik Wheeler was born an exact century ago, on 10 September 1890. The centenary is to be marked – if formalities can be got through in time – by the unveiling of a blue plaque on his house in Whitcomb Street, just by Trafalgar Square. How does Wheeler look a hundred years on? He is close to us, not just because he lived to great age and continuing influence, and not just by his contriving to be a TV star in the era before TV ruled the household. I have been reading his great monograph on Maiden Castle\*, published in the middle of the Second War when all seemed blackest, for the first time with any thoroughness. It is instructive and sobering to see how well it looks against what we do today. And this despite those same pressures that crowd in on excavation reports today: two-thirds of the book is specialist reports on the finds, with many conscientious illustrations – though not at that period with tables and measurements. It delivers – as Barry Cunliffe is happy to find in its London equivalent half a century later (p. 670) 99% of the information most readers need in convenient published form. What comes through above all, and holds the structure together, is a sense of narrative, the writing of archaeology as the telling of a story.

*Maiden Castle* encouraged me to look again at Wheeler's Rhind lectures for 1951, as made into *Archaeology from the earth*\*. Forty years on, it is in part a period piece: radiocarbon is a novelty 'in the experimental stage' (as the weary may say it still is), and standing round barrows are the routine stuff of excavation in England and in Holland (how many round barrows still stood intact in the Netherlands when van Giffen's career was done?). Yet most is fresh and sound, directly expressed and often very funny. On publication of specialist studies: 'I know a distinguished archaeologist who claims that he writes for five people; most of us are less ambitious.' The failings of fieldwork in the Near

East, specifically Palestine, make a fine running joke, so by p. 104 – after yet another error briskly condemned: 'I need hardly add that this unhappy experience was derived mainly from that land of archaeological sin, Palestine, and reopens a vista of incompetence which is by now sufficiently familiar to us.' The joke is enjoyed again in the pictures: 'Sir Flinders Petrie in the courtyard of the School in Jerusalem', intended to illustrate poor illustrations, is a triumph in the Pelican edition – a grubby rectangle of dim grey shapes in which no human being is discernible.

Enough of the funny stuff. The great value is in strong and vivid statements of founding principles and in the character, the man of action and the man of thought, that makes him turn so often to a military metaphor. The chapter on tactics and strategy is very good – and needed the more as rescue opportunities and the vagaries of funding come more to direct what chances to be dug. From his time as Director-General of Archaeology in India, he re-tells the story of tying together the South Indian sequence to the Mediterranean chronology by excavating at Arikamedu, Pondicherry, where imported Arretine ware, c. AD 45, gave a cross-date for the local complexes. Then central India was cross-dated to South India, and the chronology of a continent had been given a timetable. I chanced to read this section of *Archaeology from the earth* in the air, seven miles over the Indian Ocean; so many hours of travelling at 900 km per hour give a sense of the scale of the question, and of the style in the finding of the answer.

Where Wheeler again is bang up-to-date is in his insistence that excavations must welcome public interest and open themselves to visitors, as he did at Maiden Castle:

Under conditions of unobtrusive discipline, the general public were deliberately encouraged to visit the site. Notices directed the visitor's approach from the nearest main road. He was told (by notices) where to

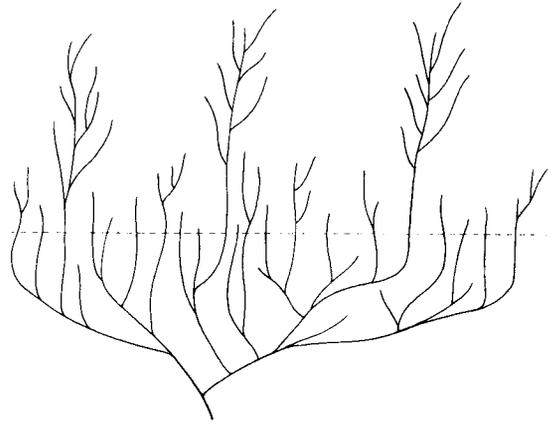
\* R.E.M. WHEELER, 1943. *Maiden Castle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London 12.

\* R.E.M. WHEELER. 1954. *Archaeology from the Earth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

park his car and where to apply for information. Throughout the excavations it was the duty of an official guide-lecturer either to explain the work to visitors or to organize reliefs of student-lecturers who, for regulated periods, undertook this task, which, incidentally, provided for the students in question an admirable training in clear thinking and simple exposition. The public was not charged for these services, but was invited to contribute to the cost of the work – a system which is in practice both democratic and more productive than a fixed tariff.

For an archaeologist, Stephen Jay Gould is the great science writer in our age. He is a scientist who writes about his own work and his colleagues', and about the ideas that inform them, rather than a journalist who observes from the outside. He writes superbly (though he drags in embarrassing and jovial analogies with American sports teams who have 'Sox' in their name). His subjects – in palaeontology, in geology, in evolutionary biology, and in the pattern of scientific ideas – are all about time, and about change and growth over time. *Time's arrow, time's cycle* (1987) is a marvellous study of the discovery of deep time in geology, exploring the twin metaphors of time as a one-way arrow, and of time as a returning cycle, that run through the classic works of Burnet, Hutton and Lyell. Gould's own work, especially the theory of punctuated equilibrium in evolution, concerns that point where science meets history, the understanding of complex changes in living systems at a remote distance in time by means of the slight data evident in the scanty fragments that chance to survive.

The new and wonderful Gould, *Wonderful life*,\* is subtitled *The Burgess Shale and the nature of history*. The Burgess Shale is a Cambrian formation in the Canadian Rockies of British Columbia, date something over 500 million BP, formed by mud-slides into shallow waters inhabited by little watery creatures. Just one formation of the Burgess, the 'phyllopod bed', 2 metres thick and exposed for 60 metres, offers the great majority of its species. There are preserved the soft-bodied creatures in all their particulars that are lacking from most Cambrian fossil beds. The Burgess was discovered in 1909 and many of its specimens described by Charles



Gould's sketch of an evolutionary tree, suggested by his interpretation of the Burgess fauna. An initial burst of diversity is cut short by extinctions. Most varieties cease, leaving a few lineages only to survive, to branch and to diversify within the limits of a few fundamental designs. The dashed line represents the time of the Burgess with diversity at a maximum.

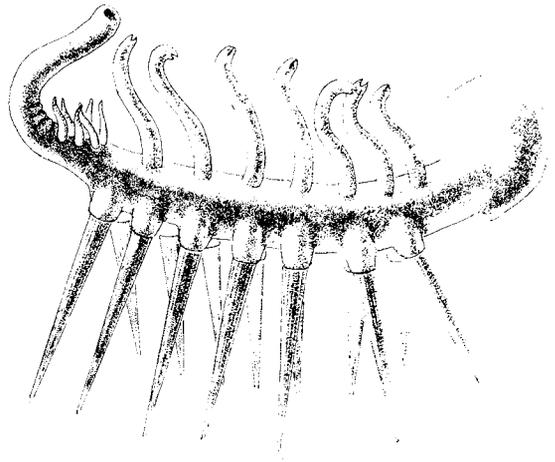
Walcott, in the intervals of his main work as Secretary of the Smithsonian. Since 1967 its fauna has been re-described by Harry Whittington and colleagues at the University of Cambridge. As well as trilobites and other standard Cambrian invertebrates, the Burgess contains a whole range of 'weird wonders', creatures whose basic design is fundamentally unlike anything known since. *Hallucigenia*, the oddest of this odd bunch, is named for its 'bizarre and dream-like appearance'. Gould presents the Burgess story as a drama in five acts. As Whittington and colleagues have described elements of the Burgess fauna in taxonomic monographs, so they have come to understand how truly original these creatures are. They are not primitive and backward variants of the later established forms, but a whole range of separate phyla. Among the Burgess fauna are the prototypes of the moderns – of insects, of crustacea, of various worms; there is even the first of the chordates, a creature with a stiffened back that prefigures the spinal column of vertebrates. But there are other designs, equally reasonable, which are the prototypes of nothing in the later fauna. In the Burgess, Gould believes, we have a proof that the traditional view of evolution as a spreading bush that grows upwards and outwards is wrong. The great diversity of forms was actually at the

\* STEPHEN JAY GOULD, *Wonderful life: the Burgess Shale and the nature of history*. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990: ISBN 0-09-174271-4 hardback £14.95.

beginning (see sketch figure), when all sorts of body plans were in order. Extinction abolished most of the variety, just as a later extinction would end the age of reptiles, and leave just a few designs to continue, to elaborate and to radiate.

It is a beautiful tale, beautifully told. What has it to do with archaeology? (The Cambrian is some thousand times older than the Lower Palaeolithic.) Many elegant points strike me in passing. There is the strength of *description*, of rigorous systematic, thinking description over the flashier delights of explanation. With description goes the strength of drawing (in this case of tiny fossils by *camera lucida* drawings) over the flashier and 'objective' record of photographs. Walcott's work in forcing the Burgess into known taxonomy is an illuminating tale of the deeper relation between evidence and ideas in a scientist's work. But the big points are in the second half of Gould's subtitle, the 'nature of history'. Most of the Burgess creatures make sense as living organisms with comprehensible anatomy. There are swimmers and bottom feeders, suspension feeders, scavengers and predators. The designs that survived after the Cambrian we can identify in retrospect as 'successful'; but there is nothing about the others that is visibly wonky, no clear means to forecast which would later die and which would later rise from obscurity so as to rule the earth. And, in the Gould view, if the earth was re-planted a second time with its Burgess fauna, later to suffer its evolutions and its decimations, there is no good cause to expect those same designs to be the winners and the losers. Life would, probably, chance to take different paths that would take it to other creatures, none of them *Homo sapiens sapiens*, though in their own way, quite as weird and wonderful.

This is the point of *Wonderful life*. It is about the large place of contingency and chance in the long and deep history of life on earth. And it must lead us to certain views of historical explanations, views which cut across the silly opposition between history and science that continually is imposed on archaeology. There are, Gould shows, two classes of science: the experimental sciences, mostly of the physical and chemical sort; and the historical sciences, like geology, evolutionary biology and astronomy.\* The historical sciences are not 'soft', squishy and peopled by inadequate workers.



*Hallucigenia sparsa*, one of the Burgess weird wonders, stands on the sea floor. The creature is about an inch long.

At the right end is a bulbous appendage called conventionally a 'head', although its nature and function are unknown. The long trunk is supported by seven pairs of sharp spines acting as struts. Above each pair of struts is a tentacle with two-pronged tip. Behind the line of seven tentacles is a group of six smaller tentacles. The trunk tails off into a narrow tube and bends away.

The workings of the beast are not easy to reconstruct. Perhaps the seven tentacles each eat as an independent mouth, passing food to a common gullet, of which the bendy tube makes the anus. If so, what is the 'head' for?

Odder still, this may not be a whole creature at all, but part of some larger and more bizarre animal.

Drawing by Marianne Collins after the original reconstruction by Simon Conway Morris.

Rather, they deal with fields where contingency is important, so that we can explain an event after it occurs, but we cannot reliably forecast it: 'historical science is not worse, more restricted.

\* Harvard, where Gould teaches, recognized this some years ago, and divided its sciences not as physical versus biological, but experimental-predictive and historical. Status nevertheless shows in which is group A and which is group B. Gould's own course on the history of earth and life is Science B-16.

Where does he think it deserves to be? I would place it as Science A-2, the senior amongst the junior partners to the history of earth and human life (i.e., for the most part, archaeology) that belongs in Science A-1.

or less capable of achieving firm conclusions because experiment, prediction, and subsumption under invariant laws of nature do not represent its usual working methods. The sciences of history use a different mode of explanation, rooted in the comparative and observational richness of our data.'

Remembering each morning that it is contingency, not virtue or progress, that led gracile australopithecines to survive rather than robust, we must know that the same truths underlie the course of cultural change in human societies, and the means we choose to make sense of them.

Antique statuary has been a fine commonplace of garden ornament in the West for centuries, in replica for the most part, which is why you are right to think the marble lady in the middle of granny's lawn is familiar. You did see her in the Roman art book. And an astute dealer who recently spotted a fine and original Renaissance sculpture overlooked in a sale of garden ornaments in Hertfordshire is now negotiating over the success of her purchase. A sales catalogue, 'The Decorated Garden' from Spink, respected London dealers and medallists to the Royal Family in St James's, not so far from Wheeler's new blue plaque, displays a new variant. Noting how much 18th- and 19th-century gardeners enjoyed exotic plants from the East, and invented the glass conservatory as a place to nurture them, it suggests the two themes be combined – by standing sculptures from India and Southeast Asia in a setting of plants from the same region, either in the conservatory or out of doors. A series of photographs, taken in St James's Park by permission of the Department of the Environment, illustrate the theme: 'Marble pillar, India, Amaravati style, 2nd century', 'Chalk figure of Hanuman, East Java, 14th century', 'Sandstone Ganesha, India, 10th century', 'Sandstone lion, India, 10th/11th century', 'Schist figure of Maitreya, Gandhara, 4th century', 'Sandstone torso, India, 10th century', and more.

It startles me. What place do these pieces have in an English garden where frost and moisture will soon assault them into a pleasing patina of decay? One is even of wood. Don't they belong in India or Java, and if in England then properly conserved in a museum environment, in a manner which shows some physical respect for

the age and beauty of the sculptures, and for the old and sacred places whence they come? Should these things ever have been carted away to the West as curiosities for the garden-designer, to be admired for their first decade in Wimbledon, overlooked for a second, abandoned for a third? And should one be comfortable to see them being traded about in Britain, legal though that is? Do they arrive in ones and twos, or transhipped by the 40-foot container full? They may be genre pieces; perhaps those parts of the East are full of the things, and no one minds few or many being sold for precious hard currency. But English parish churches are genre pieces – of much the same period when not more recent; there are hundreds and hundreds of them, and many are not put much to use nowadays. But we think they belong here, and we would not like to see them exported to decorate the parks and gardens of the wealthy East.

Are these in fact not ancient and sacred sculptures, but artful *replicas*, resin casts like those in every museum shop? Expensive persons no longer wear leopard-skin coats, as the point has finally got across that only leopards deserve to look good in leopard-skin. And cheaper persons no longer wear artificial leopard-skin and hope it is so good you cannot tell the difference. Would you want, now, to be mistaken for a person who happily wears an endangered species when all you have on is nylon? We have not yet reached that point with antiquities scattered in the garden. Replicas, like granny's *Venus de Milo* are to be looked at, with pride, altogether as if they were the real thing. If they were not even replicas, but new works made in pastiche of the genuine antiquities, then a well-organized industry could satisfy all interests – provide the West with exotic ornaments, keep the spirit of these ancient cultures alive, generate employment and export currency for the East. But with such deliberately broken, distressed and eroded pastiches we should be back with the people who wish to look as if they are wearing a leopard's skin. However, these pieces are neither replicas nor pastiches. They are the real thing.

The Spink brochure suggests that one contact Jane Thurston-Hoskins for further information. The Assistant Editor rang up, gave his name, said that he had bought from Spink & Sons Ltd before (true, he purchased three 22-carat Ameri-

can Eagle coins in 1985), and said he was enquiring on behalf of an interested 'friend'. Ms Thurston-Hoskins said that the pieces were genuine and intimated that all but two of those illustrated had been sold; a 'Limestone figure of Uma, Khmer, 11th century', and the wooden piece – a Buddha from Nepal '13th/14th century' – remained. The latter, he was told, came from an Italian collection; if we bought it we should not place it outside, but in a conservatory, as shown in the photo. There was also a further Indian sandstone fragment, 10th century, of dancing figures (like the one illustrated and already sold) from a Swiss collection, that might go for around £15,000. When he enquired concerning export licences, the legal status of the objects, and used the phrase 'national heritage', the temperature of the conversation became, by degrees, distinctly icy. He assured her that his friend's sole concern was that he should not do anything that was in any way illegal. She assured him that everything was of course perfectly legal and reminded him of Spink's reputation. They finished their conversation.

Sotheby's did very well with Indian and Gandharan stone sculptures in New York recently (21–2 March 1990). The June issue of the new journal *Minerva*, edited by two established British archaeologists (Barri Jones and Peter Clayton) enthusiastically reports this auction in among its many pages of glossy dealer advertisements (page 37): 'A powerful Gandharan grey schist figure of a winged Atlas, third century A.D., 15 3/4", estimated at \$15,000–\$25,000, reached \$39,600 . . . the sale totalled \$2,368,960.'

These prices, like those for the Celtic statuary reported in the last editorial, are in the range of what a superb but now environmentally *passé* fur coat used to cost, and far lower than the prices paid by the seriously rich for the works of named artists of more recent centuries. They thus represent a level of affordable – and, at present, socially acceptable – status object expenditure for the not-quite-super-rich.

As we understand things, both India and Pakistan introduced strict antiquities laws after Partition and while India seems to have allowed some legitimate export until the early seventies nothing has ever left Pakistan legally unless in *partage* with a foreign mission. In Nepal obtaining an export licence need not always be a

problem but in Indonesia, licensing continued, after independence was gained in 1949, to be controlled by the stringent Dutch legislation of 1931.

If mass reproduction of ancient Asian statuary was started, then, as effectively indistinguishable copies spread through middle-class suburbias and – along with handle-less spades and wheel-less wheelbarrows – and eventually found their way into the back rooms of charity shops, the bottom might fall out of the current market

☪ This editorial is written in June, the month when academic archaeologists in Europe shake off the dust of finals examining and go to their more proper place in the trenches. The first long spells of ethnographic fieldwork are, they say, so overwhelming an experience for many anthropologists that all they do and write thereafter represents a coming-to-terms with its psychological impact. Excavation isn't, shouldn't be that intense, but there is and there should be an edge to it. Just which site to excavate? Just where to put the hole? Mistakes in that can lose everything – the rock shelter, after weeks to negotiate a permit, which yields 5 cm of sheep-droppings and then bottom – but these are not matters of the technical alone. There is, and properly, an emotional element. I was working last year on one of the smaller Mediterranean islands; today its land is so crowded, built over, terraced and otherwise interfered with that the old hands say that field survey is impossible. Maybe. We tried anyway, and found there were still distinct prehistoric sites to be picked up. I took a student group to the best, a big prehistoric pottery scatter with just one obsidian flake (but just one is enough), for us to have another poke about the place. It is a fine spot, high on the eastern slope of a flat-topped hill like a mesa: you look down-slope to the village clustered round the church. Why did it move all of us so much? I was near to tears (but then I cry easily). I think this is why: it was in *this* spot. in *this* place that people lived and died and had their being. Their settlement was overwhelmed, or moved downhill to the water. All memory and knowledge of their lives has been lost. To us, to Reuben, to Ramón, to Nathaniel, and to myself, on field survey, was given the privilege of finding that place again and, through finding it, to discover that those people lived, to have

some kind of communion with them – however absurdly remote and slight – and in that way to know them. As Wheeler always said, archaeology must be about digging up *people*.

Fieldwork has other amusements. I like the intensity of a small group living and working closely, not always under easy conditions. Even the tensions can amuse: our group last year divided into a key-holding faction, conventionally securing the door at all times, versus a non-locking faction. There not being enough to go round a large group, some of us in the non-locking group didn't actually have keys and rather thought the door should be open. Worse, the locking faction went to bed early, so when we of the free faction came home from the café it was already too late. They grumbled if you woke them up, and one night it seemed easier to sleep on someone else's floor.

So I go to the field this year again in a fitting state of nerves and anticipation. There is only one thing I cannot bear on a dig, and that is hiding something – whether ancient or modern – to make a joke when an innocent excavator stumbles across it in his trowelling and looks ridiculous. It is a curious fact that whenever this has happened to me, the culprit turned out to be the site director. Don't field directors have better things to do? As this editorial is published I have my trivial revenge on last year's director. When his crew this month take out the sand that we put over a fine, full grave-pit to protect it through the winter, they will also find at the top a shabby, nasty pair of rotting shoes, very large (I am blessed with size 11 feet). And, to think, the pit was sealed, the whole site fortified for the close season, and the padlock bolted by the gentleman in question – without my shoes in place.\* Serve him right for having the sense of humour I lack. Serve me right that I have been nudged into the same silly trick.

☞ The scale of antiquities thefts in the direct manner took a new jump in April when the Museum of Ancient Corinth was emptied by thieves who broke in at dawn and overpowered the guard. The list of items missing runs to just under 300 items, including monumental sculpt-

ure and all the pots essential for some unlucky student's Ph.D. It took a lorry to shift it all away, and a hoist to get the big stuff on the truck.

☞ A fragment from the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* for 1917 has been decorating a colleague's door: at Ipswich Museum, on 4 April, Miss Nina F. Layard, FLS read a paper on 'A Tool-making Parrot', illustrated by lantern slides and exhibits of the wooden tools made by the bird. Those were the days!

☞ If some of the language in ANTIQUITY – and the rest of the literature – seems harder going than is comfortable (despite all efforts), then be grateful you are not a young officer in the Chinese army, where your duty is to face each day the Six Dialectical Unities:

First, the dialectical unity of the subjective and the objective. Second, the dialectical unity of the specific situation and the general situation. Third, the dialectical unity of the principal contradictions and the secondary contradictions. Fourth, the dialectical unity of all the people and the individual. Fifth, the dialectical unity of knowledge and action. Sixth, the dialectical unity for the masses and the leaders.

CHRISTOPHER CHIPPINDALE

### Noticeboard

We are trying a noticeboard space at the end of the editorial to see if this has a useful rôle. All notices worth the posting are welcome.

#### *Antiquaries Third World bursary*

The Society of Antiquaries in London has set up a bursary scheme for citizens and residents of under-developed countries. It will support persons who have been accepted by to a UK university for post-graduate study in archaeology or a related field. Applications by 30 April for awards tenable from the following October. Details from: *General Secretary, Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0HS.*

#### *Medieval Europe: York conference, 1992*

In 1992 there arrive some technical changes in the European Economic Community, which all and sundry are using as good cause to make 1992 a special European year. The combined forces of the York Archaeological Trust, the York University department, and the Society for Medieval Archaeology hold a major conference, 'Medieval Europe 1992', 21–24

\* The fence was unclimbable, but at one spot you could wriggle under it.



***An International  
Conference of  
Medieval Archaeology***

*21st – 24th September 1992  
University of York*

**Organised by York Archaeological  
Trust, the Society for Medieval  
Archaeology, and the Department  
of Archaeology, University of York**

September in York. Its themes are Urbanism; Maritime studies, ports and ships; Technology and innovation; Death and burial; Exchange and trade; Religion and belief; Art and symbolism; Rural settlement. Further details from, and offers of papers (by 1 March 1991) to: *Medieval Europe 1992. 1 Pavement, York YO1 2XA.*

*Documents for history of American archaeology*

The history of archaeology is having a good run at the present, with some first-rate books, and a growing knowledge that what we thought then has a real importance for what we think now. Anxious that the documents which record our history be safe, the new Committee on the History of Archaeology of the Society for American Archaeology plans to compile and publish a directory of known archival sources and to seek out archive material and facilitate its placing in suitable archives. Comments, suggestions, information, especially about the preservation of personal papers, field notes, recordings etc. to: Douglas R. Givens, SAA Committee on the History of Archaeology, St Louis Community College – Meramec, 11333 Big Bend Boulevard, St Louis MO 63122, USA.

*BANEA and TAG conferences*

Two regular fixtures in the winter season of British conferences are:

BANEA, annual conference of the British Association for Near Eastern Archaeology, at Birmingham, 9–11 November 1990. Details from: *BANEA at Birmingham. Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT.*

TAG, annual conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group, at Lampeter, 17–20 December (the 1989 conference was reviewed in the June number, pp. 303–6). Details from: *TAG90. Department of Archaeology, Saint David's University College, University of Wales, Lampeter, Dyfed SA48 7ED.*

*East Asian Archaeology Network*

A new, informal network. Details from: Gina L. Barnes, St John's College, Cambridge CB2 1TP.

*Czechoslovakia*

Dr Evžen Neustupný has been elected Director of the Archaeological Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences. In a free vote of all 70-odd staff of its three branches (Prague, Plzeň and Most) Dr Neustupný won the election (which used a single transferable vote system) on the second ballot, narrowly defeating the existing tenant of the post, Dr Miroslav Richter. Dr Neustupný is well known to western archaeologists for a number of seminal works on theoretical issues, including the award-winning essay *Whither archaeology?* in *ANTIQUITY*.

In his 'election manifesto', Dr Neustupný emphasizes the need for change in the orientation of the Institute to reflect the changing conditions of the country, and in particular the arrival of a market economy and multi-party system. He discusses the relevance of the long-term research excavations which have tended to be the flagships of the Institute's work hitherto, and favours a flexible approach to fieldwork in which projects would in future be assessed on their individual merits and funded by a

'grant' system. He sees a greater use of technical aids, and a relative increase of technical in proportion to academic staff. It will come as no surprise that he favours increasing contacts with the West, and is actively developing exchanges and collaborations with a number of British universities.

Comparable changes have also occurred in the Institutes in Moravia and Slovakia; these will be reported in a future number.

## THE FAR SIDE in ANTIQUITY



"'That's fine', I said. 'Good nose', I said. But no, you had to go and hit the chisel one more time!"