

BOOK REVIEWS

Jaroslav Malina and Zdenek Vašíček, *Archaeology yesterday and today. The development of archaeology in the sciences and humanities*, Foreword by A.F. Harding. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990, pp. 320 + xiv, 50 figs.

Reviewed by Arkadiusz Marciniak

The book by Malina and Vašíček is another attempt to write a coherent history of archaeological thought, which became a clearly articulated tendency in contemporary archaeology. It is especially valuable to see a book on this topic written by Central European scholars and then translated into English and available to a wider public. As such, it should be a valuable textbook for English-speaking archaeologists.

The book presents the development of archaeology within the large context of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and historiography. However, it becomes difficult to assess these objectives, because they have never been explicitly formulated. Paradoxically, the clearest indicator of the goal of the monograph is its title. The book consists of two general parts, which seem to be poorly related one to another. The first part (chapters 1 to 5) is devoted to the detailed presentation of human interest in a remote history and the development of archaeology as an independent discipline enabling a coherent recognition of the past. The first four chapters in the first part of the book present the development of archaeology and archaeological thought while chapter five elaborates the recent history of the discipline.

To be able to grasp the most crucial points in the development of archaeology, the authors claim that the ideas represented have always been an extrapolation of the present into the past. The history of ideas about the arche is therefore the history of methods and ideas about the whole world. Such a perspective is consequently applied in the analysis of archaeology's scope and objectives from the very beginning of its constitution. They see the emergence of archaeology, its scope and meaning within the framework of ancient Greek mythology in the fifth century BC. The further development of archaeology, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, is described quite briefly which is fully justified by its relative importance. The emergence of archaeology as an independent scientific discipline in the nineteenth century has been discussed in some detail. Of special importance in this process is the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was characterized by the dramatic increase in encyclopaedic knowledge and the lack of any synthesis merging these usually scattered materials. Malina and Vašíček devoted considerable effort to presenting the intellectual background of this development. This part of the book is very erudite. However, the erudition is not fully justified because, as a result, they lose sight of the most important issues. The detailed characteristics of various disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology or psychology, while obviously important for archaeology, are not sufficiently stressed as having a direct impact on the

development of archaeology. As it turned out, the issues which should have supplemented the narrative, became its most important part.

Another chapter in the first part deals with the twentieth century and it suffers from the same weakness. It seems that the authors have no clear idea of how to cope with the enormous diversity of archaeological schools emerging from the beginning of the twentieth century. It is the authors' privilege to evaluate the importance of particular events and people. However, some of their decisions, in this regard, seem to be quite controversial and sometimes unjustified. For example, they almost completely avoid the achievements of Gordon Childe, whose works are hardly touched. They have mentioned only that his thinking was characterized by an interesting application of Marx's ideas, such an important issue from the point of view of history of Central European archaeology, and this idea was not discussed in greater detail.

The evaluation of contemporary archaeology, bearing in mind that the objective of the book is to write the general history of modern archaeology, suffers from similar omissions. Some crucial elements of archaeological thought such as the concept of middle-range theory, theory of archaeological recording, the importance of behavioural archaeology, the postprocessual movement, and the social context of archaeology seem to be underestimated or even avoided, and this has been scarcely justified by the authors. On the other hand, they devoted considerable interest to the French school, hardly mentioned in other syntheses (e.g., Trigger 1989).

Paradoxically, Malina and Vašíček have not succeeded in the clear presentation of the basic tenets, achievements and importance of Central European archaeology. As a consequence, they were not able to fill the gap clearly seen in other recent attempts to write a history of archaeological thought (see Trigger 1989). One might also expect that authors from Central Europe would be able to grasp the causes of development of such dramatic differences in the practice of prehistoric archaeology in continental Europe and the UK. Similarly inadequately, they explore the differences between Anglo-American and European prehistory. They seem to underestimate the important impact of continental philosophy on Anglo-American archaeology. The importance of Polish archaeology has not been satisfactorily presented either and the lack of numerous works by Abramowicz in their bibliography is a clear example of this failure. The presentation of Russian and Soviet archaeology seems also to be chaotic and does not give a clear idea of how this archeology was being developed.

The second part of the book is devoted to the presentation of the authors' original procedure of archaeological enquiry which can be very briefly defined as the transition from archaeography to archaeology and prehistory. The greater part of the book, however, is already known from many of Malina's publications (e.g., 1977, 1980). It seems as though the authors used the book on the history of archaeological thought to present to an English-speaking audience their own ideas covering a slightly different topic. The starting point of the authors' thoughts on archaeography is the concept of an archaeological record understood as an indicator, using the metaphor of witness which hardly clarifies the definition. This proposition suggests a passive understanding of the record. The description of archaeological data has an external character and consists of external attributes and they claim that this procedure has little to do with any explanation of prehistoric phenomena. They exert considerable effort in summarizing various techniques of description and classification. Ultimately, they believe that the objective description and classification of empirical material is the sole basis for formulation of theoretical concepts and hypotheses. This endeavour allows the description of entities which are basically unobservable. Thus, they believe, it is possible to build a coherent program for archaeology which they call hypothetical-deductive. The authors present numerous examples of testing hypotheses. Although somewhat convincing, it is surprising that these examples are almost exclusively based on rather old works, the most recent ones coming from the 1960s.

The transition from archaeography to archaeology can be achieved by the use of analogy, understood by Malina and Vašíček in a formal way as similarities between some properties, or the relationship between two phenomena. While stressing the importance of analogy, at the same time they

advocate more ethnoarchaeological research, believing that certain facts drawn from ethnographic material may, in similar circumstances, give similar results in prehistory. It seems as though they see the role of ethnoarchaeology in very much the same way as processual archaeology.

They stress the difference between archaeology and prehistory, the former occupies the central role in the latter. Concepts of the past - the creation of synchronic and diachronic entities - are constructed as general hypotheses. In drawing general conclusions, they claim that empirical observations depend on the theoretical framework, and that theory and data are two complementary components of one process. However, when they deal with detailed analysis, it appears to be contradictory to those general considerations when they treat description and classification of archaeological material as objective one. As a result, this proposition is highly formal and draws little attention to the relation between objectivity of description, and description as interpretation.

REFERENCES

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Jean Vercoutter, *The search for Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames and Hudson 1992 (original French edition 1986), pp. 207. "New Horizons" (Ancient Worlds).

Reviewed by Andrzej Niwiński

Professor Jean Vercoutter, an excellent scholar and president of the French Association of Egyptologists has undertaken the task of presenting a most interesting subject: the long history of study of the ancient Egyptian civilisation, taking into consideration the first European travellers and collectors, some distinguished archaeologists of the 19th century, and modern research methods. Since Egyptology is in possession of a very ample source material, and the book has a small format, one gets an impression that the author was obliged to respect rigid frameworks and to make difficult decisions in choosing between equally good and interesting subjects. It should, of course, be stressed that he has ingeniously solved this problem. The result is that the reader is unable to tear himself away, and it is only a professional Egyptologist who would regret how many important things have been excluded in this valuable outline.

Here is perhaps a good place to remark on the general advantages and disadvantages of such compact books which are wide spread and fashionable. An unquestionable good point of these is their price: 6.95 pounds is not very much for a book of high editorial quality, printed on good paper and containing plenty of illustrations. These are sometimes very attractive, indeed: we find in the reviewed book numerous reproductions from the colour plates once published in the practically inaccessible works of some 19th century travellers, and also there is an interesting colour folding plate with a conventional map of tourist