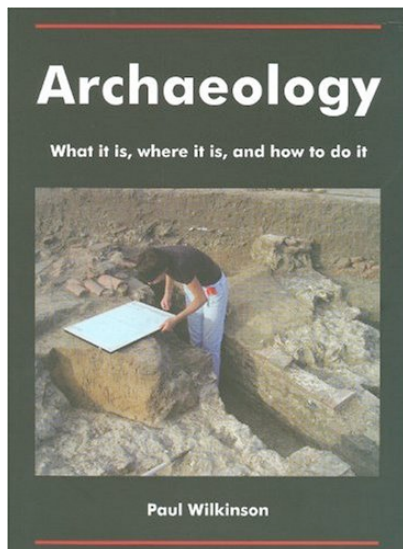


RBL 10/2009



Wilkinson, Paul

Archaeology: What It Is, Where It Is, and How to Do It

Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007. Pp. 103. Paper. \$24.95.
ISBN 1905739001.

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The thin volume (104 pages) reviewed below is a very succinct but largely highly successful introduction to field archaeology. While not as expansive and exhaustive as some excellent introductory texts that have appeared in recent years (represented, first and foremost, by the excellent introductory volume, now having been revised several times, by Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (3rd ed.; London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), this volume can serve as an introductory textbook for courses in field methods in archaeology, both for classroom work, but more importantly as a supplementary text for practical “field schools” in field archaeology conducted at many excavations throughout the world. While clearly focused on British archaeology (as seen in the reference to materials that are found in more humid environments, such as wood, and the use of historical materials relevant for the U.K.), much of the materials and methods discussed in the volume are relevant for archaeologists practicing good and largely up-to-date field excavation, recording, and field preservation methods throughout the world. The lucid, non-jargon-laden and user-friendly text, the many illustrations, and the feeling that the writer is basing what he writes on many years of actual field experience turn this small volume into a real gem. Not only can it be used as a textbook for students; it can serve as a guideline for topics to be covered in more general introductions of archaeology, where a certain part of the classroom work is devoted to aspects of field methods.

Following a general introduction by the author, the book is divided into twelve chapters. Chapter 1, "Documentary Sources," deals with the use of existing documentary sources to plan the archaeological work and gather as much information as possible before the actual excavation. The main focus of this chapter is with various cartographic resources, based, as noted above, on the typical cartographic resources available in the U.K. Less stressed are the use of historical, literary, and other written sources that can assist in identifying the existence of a site, proposed identifications, and, ultimately, complement the data from the archaeological excavation. As an archaeologist working in the Near East, the last lacuna is something that would have to be noted if this was used as a textbook for students planning to work in the Near East.

Chapter 2, "Aerial Survey for Archaeologists," presents an overview of the use and utility of aerial photography for identifying sites and features. For the most part, the focus of this chapter is placed on identifying sites before excavation, less on the use of aerial photography for the documentation and understanding of excavations. An aspect that is missing in this chapter is a discussion of the use of satellite-born imagery, which has contributed substantially to archaeology throughout the world.

Chapter 3, "Ground Survey," discusses the importance and method of practicing archaeological survey, both as a method for obtaining information about a site before excavation and also for obtaining information of sites and regions that are not excavated. In this chapter, as opposed the chapter 4, the focus is on surveying regions and sites without actually removing and collecting objects. This includes field walking and drawing basic plans and various methods of remote sensing, using geophysical methods (magnometry, ground penetrating radar, etc.).

In chapter 4 ("Archaeological Field Survey") the author discusses methods of conducting what he terms archaeological field survey (as opposed to ground survey), the former of which is seen as including picking up finds and accurately recording the actual archaeological remains. Personally, I believe that the division between the two topics covered in chapters 3 and 4 is somewhat artificial, but perhaps this has to do with traditions in British archaeology.

In chapter 5 ("Site Excavation and the Site Grid") the author starts dealing with the "nitty gritty" details of actual excavation. He discusses method of laying out a "grid" for an excavation as well as measuring the location of finds in and around a site. This chapter is particularly useful for beginners, as it provides excellent and easy-to-follow explanations on basic surveying techniques.

In chapter 6 (“The Drawn Record”) there is an overview of methods of graphically recording the finds in the excavation. Although there is some overlap with the previous chapter, it provides nice examples, some basic tools on how to map features of different types, and how to draw “sections” in an archaeological excavation.

Chapter 7 (“The Written Record”) provides a concise explanation of the importance of and a particular method for the verbal description of the archaeological finds. Once again, archaeologists working in other regions may be familiar with other methods of recording and registration, but the basic idea and importance are rightfully stressed.

Chapter 8 (“Recording Stone and Timber”) deals with the issue of recording the main materials of archaeological architecture. Although this reviewer would not have put this in a separate chapter (perhaps combining chapters 5, 7, and 8), the author does, once again, explain the importance of recording, one particular method for this, as well as various terms for architectural forms. Once again, the chapter clearly shows that the author is thinking in the terms of British or European architecture, for what is completely missing for an archaeologist in the Near East is apt reference to brick architecture.

Chapter 9 (“Recording Skeletons”) is a very brief description of practical method of excavating and recording the skeletal data from burials (and other contexts in which human materials are found). While the importance of DNA studies is mentioned, unfortunately, no reference is made to the required field methods when excavating bones intended for DNA analysis.

Chapter 10 (“Soil Sampling”) is a brief overview of various analytic methods that utilize “soil samples” for analysis. In effect, the topics covered in this chapter might aptly be termed “environmental archaeology” (as the author himself notes), as he covers topics that are not only “soil samples” (e.g., zooarchaeology). In addition, from a perspective of proper terminology, I would prefer perhaps the term “sediments” instead of “soil,” but that is a small detail. The author is to be commended for discussing in this chapter various types of methods, including pollen, mollusks, entomology, floatation, geomorphology, and so on.

Chapter 11 (“Small Finds”) is an all-too-brief chapter on how to excavate, record, and conserve the various types of objects found in an excavation. This is a chapter that I would have preferred to be slightly more expansive, as this is one of the most difficult and “missed” opportunities in most excavations—the improper recording, excavating, and long-term preservation of finds—and much data is lost due to this.

Chapter 12 (“What Next?”) is a brief attempt to wrap up the volume and provide further interest for the novice. This chapter is followed by a brief list of relevant bibliography, a nice continuation for those “bitten by the bug” after reading this book. Surprisingly, missing from this list is the excellent introductory textbook by Renfrew and Bahn mentioned above.

All told, this is a very nice, if concise, introduction to the methods, practices, and enjoyment of archaeological fieldwork. Although this can and should be supplemented by other reading and actual field experience, it is a nice way to start getting familiar with what archaeology is all about.