
The Archaeology Coursebook: An Introduction to Study Skills, Topics, and Methods by J. Grant, S. Gorin, and N. Fleming

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The practice of archaeology has been undertaken in some fashion for centuries. As early as the 12th and 13th centuries, Italian farmers living around Pisa found Roman statues and sarcophagi in the course of plowing, and eventually even started to look for them to collect. Explorations in the regions around Vesuvius began in the 18th century and are usually considered to mark the beginning of modern archaeology. Yet it was not until the 19th century, principally with Heinrich Schliemann, that archaeological methodology finally started becoming somewhat scientific, and included record-keeping and systematic exploration. Nonetheless, for most of the 20th century, archaeologists were still trained as classicists or historians, that is, as specialists in particular cultures or geographical areas, and archaeological methodology was something that was taught on site and through practice rather than in the classroom. Not until the last few decades has archaeology come to be considered a discipline worthy of study in its own right. Archaeology, with its own specific theory and methodology, is now considered to be a discipline separate from all others and is no longer connected to the study of any particular region or culture. Techniques and practice are learned in the classroom and in the field, and can then be adapted to the specific sites and cultures to be explored. In the United States, it is typically a discipline offered at the post-secondary level; but in the United Kingdom, students can begin the study while still in high school, and indeed it is a subject available for A level exams.

Textbooks designed for courses in archaeology are still relatively new. A few introductory level textbooks are available, but the choices are quite limited. Grant, Gorin, and Fleming's *The Archaeology*

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Coursebook enlarges this small group. The intended audience is mostly secondary school students and teachers, and the authors are in fact secondary school teachers themselves. The book contains specific sections on study skills and projects that are designed to correspond with secondary school classes in England and Wales. The authors also note that they intend the textbook to be appropriate for first year undergraduates as well [xxvi–xxvii].

Unfortunately, even with the significant revisions present in its current second edition, the book still compares unfavorably in most ways to another introductory text, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*, by Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn (Thames and Hudson), now in its 4th edition. The most important advantage of Grant, Gorin, and Fleming's text is cost. Their book retails for only \$34.95, while Renfrew and Bahn's is priced at \$71.00. Nonetheless, the difference in the quality of the two books is so striking that even at twice the price, Renfrew and Bahn's text will still no doubt prove a superior choice in most situations.

The differences are immediately apparent on visual inspection. Despite the fact that the two books have similar dimensions in height and width, and similar size font and type, *The Archaeology Coursebook* contains only 346 pages, compared to *Archaeology*'s 656; so it is immediately clear that *The Archaeology Coursebook* lacks the depth of *Archaeology*. The quality of the paper and binding is also significantly different. *The Archaeology Coursebook*'s pages are thin, matte-finished, and nearly see-through, while *Archaeology*'s are thicker and glossier. The quality of the paper matters especially with the reproduction of the illustrations. Both books are heavily illustrated, and contain diagrams, charts, maps, architectural drawings, and side-boxes in addition to many black and white photographs. Neither book uses color photos. But in *Archaeology*, the sheen on the paper helps to enliven all the illustrations and make them more appealing, while in *The Archaeology Coursebook* they appear dull and drab. In addition to black, white, and gray, *Archaeology* also uses various shades of blue throughout the book in places such as the background in the side-boxes, as well as for highlighted text, emphasis on the maps, and so forth, which adds another level of visual interest, while *The Archaeology Coursebook* uses only black, white, and gray.

But even more significant than the appearance of the books, the text in *The Archaeology Coursebook* compares unfavorably to *Archae-*

ology. For one thing, *The Archaeology Coursebook* is clearly aimed at a British audience. Most examples of sites and finds are drawn from those in the United Kingdom, and the legal and bureaucratic institutions and procedures discussed are all based on how things are done in the UK.¹ The authors quite obviously do not expect to find much of an audience elsewhere. And with such a UK-centered perspective, they will not get one.

The text is very straightforward and matter-of-fact, and it delivers information about archaeological methods and practice in a clear and organized manner. The intention is to prepare students to succeed in an introductory level course, to develop study skills, and to manage class assignments and exams; and this drives the authors to ensure that the material is presented in a way that is clear and easily accessible. But the tone is so even that it fails to convey a sense of excitement or enthusiasm about the subject. The sentences are short and follow only a few simple construction schemes, so that the writing itself lacks punch or interest. In terms of content, the emphasis is almost entirely on how and where to practice archaeology, but, with a few notable exceptions (such as the section on social archaeology) rarely on why. The authors do a good job of explaining procedures, giving background and examples, highlighting key sites and key terms, suggesting tasks for practice, and inviting further study by providing information about websites that relate to the topics under consideration, but they have not written an interesting book that will engage many students or encourage them to develop an interest in the subject that goes beyond the classroom. In other words, *The Archaeology Coursebook* is an adequate text that does not present misinformation or otherwise mislead, but lacks a dynamic approach.

The text is divided into three major sections. The first, 'Understanding Archaeological Resources', is further subdivided into parts that outline basic methodology and practices in archaeological exploration, explain various means of analyzing findings (including a separate section on dating issues), discuss interpretation of the findings, examine ways to protect and preserve sites and objects, and finally,

¹ See, for example, pages 5–9 on researching maps and historical documents: the examples of types of files, offices where they are kept, and procedures to use them are all British.

discuss ways to present the findings. The emphasis throughout this section is always on the beginning student, so that terminology is carefully defined, technical skills are explained, basic exercises are incorporated in side-boxes throughout, and lots of illustrations and examples are presented. All of it is solidly grounded in the experience of the authors and all of it is presented in clear and understandable fashion. Section 2, 'Studying Themes in Archaeology' has a grander ambition in that it focuses on human experience and includes subsections on religion, settlement patterns, trade and economy, and social issues such as political organization, power, gender, and ethnicity, and even provides a few pages [285–290] on social change and conflict. This section is where the authors largely confine their thoughts about how human beings lived in the past and how archaeology helps to illuminate aspects that text cannot. Finally, the last section, 'Examination, Success and Beyond', is filled with practical applications relating to the classroom, and includes examples of projects and exercises that can be completed for a grade, advice and practical suggestions for studying for exams, and includes information about places to study archaeology both below university level and at universities in the UK. This section is quite obviously principally designed for high school students in the UK; and while some of it can be adapted to other levels and locations, it limits the usefulness of the book.

Archaeology, on the other hand, is far superior, both at speaking to a global audience, and at presenting an introduction to a discipline that the authors themselves clearly find fascinating. While it too delivers the requisite material, it does so in a way that is lively and interesting, asking lots of questions (indeed, every chapter title is a question), highlighting controversial issues, making discussion of ethics central to practice, and examining current political and cultural thought that shapes the way archaeology is practiced and funded in various places throughout the world. It takes a much more universal perspective and draws on a much more global range of examples. It does not shy away from difficult but important archaeological issues such as the excavations carried on at the site of the World Trade Center after September 11, 2001, the consequences of the war in Iraq, or the manipulation for political or nationalistic reasons of how we present and interpret the past. Thus, *Archaeology* is not only interesting, it presents archaeology as a vitally impor-

tant discipline, relevant to the present. *The Archaeology Coursebook* really cannot compare in this regard.

In conclusion then, an engaging, enthusiastic high school teacher in the UK could probably overcome the dullness of *The Archaeology Coursebook* with an exciting approach to the subject in the classroom, and might therefore choose *The Archaeology Coursebook* for its clarity, brevity, and low cost. But there is little reason why anyone else would want to use this book when a much better, more expensive but still affordable alternative exists.