

KINDRED SCHOLARS: IN THE FIELD WITH ARCHAEOLOGISTS

BEN MARSH

He discovered early on that people will put up with almost anything under the guise of archeology.

—Kent Flannery, 1982

What other scholarly activity has the panache of field archaeology? The airplane trips to exotic places, a dusty mound, the bustle of workers and wheelbarrows, neat square holes in tan earth yielding wreckage of lost civilizations or the occasional human limb. Good research is done in the Canadian Arctic and New Jersey, but the beloved excavations are in arid climates—long vistas, dry trenches, spicy food, good tans. Big is good, a big mound, a large city, a long record. Archaeologists' public image is second to none—the romantic movie hero, the John Noble Wilford write-up in the *New York Times*, a borrowed nuclear submarine to survey the floor of the Mediterranean, all earning adulation from the nine-to-five scrunched down in the next seat on the airplane. The costume alone is worth time on the cross in graduate school: a neocolonial big hat, epaulets and flap pockets on the shirt, and maybe beige pants with a tool belt like the Construction Worker wears in the Village People.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

Archaeology and geography aren't quite separate disciplines.¹ Work in the two fields can be very similar—with similar research questions, similar evidence, similar models, similar field methods. Similar scholarship is pursued about human use of the land, about patterns of economic and social activity, about ecological and subsistence enterprises, about cultural variation from place to place and time to time, and about the general mechanics of culture. Many of the skills that make good physical geographers are important to field archaeologists: spatial perception, three-dimensional visualization, drafting, and a fondness for the concrete. Even the tools are shared—shovel, transit, Munsell soil-color book, geographic information systems.

Geography and archaeology are clearly kindred fields. But what kind of kin are they? Siblings, perhaps? With unspoken shared values, siblings can be highly cooperative and communicate efficiently. Once a project has begun, perhaps marital metaphors are the best: mutually dependent and complementary—and maybe darkly combative. Or is the kinship too often parent and child, between the archaeologist-principal investigator and the geographer-consultant? My experience has been that

* DR. MARSH is a professor of geography and environmental studies at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania 17837.