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Greater numbers of men and women around the world are becoming increasingly familiar with archaeology. Although many of these people may have only heard the word, others may actually have developed some idea of what the field entails. But even though the discipline of archaeology is finding a greater place in today's popular culture, the vast majority of individuals who are somewhat familiar with archaeology may have little understanding of the true nature of archaeological research. For many, the well-lit exhibits presented in imposing museums, the expertly produced documentaries shown on television, and the authoritative stories published in newspapers may indicate that archaeology is a profoundly scientific but yet mysterious discipline. Even men and women who have some concept of what archaeologists actually do, may not have a complete understanding of how archaeologists think, how they gather and use information, and how they create interpretations of the past. This process seems arcane and unattainable to most non-archaeologists.

The general, often-widespread misconceptions of archaeological research are often promoted by archaeologists themselves. We can envision them, if we wish, as men and women wearing white laboratory coats, desiring only to work unmolested in cloistered laboratories cluttered with the finds of antiquity. They may appear to many as almost mythic individuals who, through some unrevealed means, have learned the secrets of the past. Growing numbers of professional archaeologists are now realizing, however, that this image of archaeology and archaeologists is not healthy for a discipline that depends so strongly for its future on public funds and widespread commitment. Archaeologists are increasingly acknowledging their obligations to the public. Dr. Pedro Paulo A. Funari is among this insightful group, and he has given us a clear and much-needed introduction to the archaeological process.

In this important book, Dr. Funari explores all the major topics that make archaeology the exciting and important discipline it has come to be. He diligently guides us through the process of thinking about historical time and he shows us how archaeologists put their ideas into practice. He expertly explains the equal importance of field excavation and laboratory analysis, and imparts a firm understanding of the often-delicate process of archaeological interpretation.

Explaining archaeological interpretation is one of the most meaningful tasks that archaeologists can undertake, and we are fortunate to have Dr. Funari's enlightening comments. Many people who encounter archaeology for the first time may initially believe that the archaeological process is relatively straightforward: that archaeologists simply dig up some facts and then let those facts tell them about the past. They then write their archaeological reports and create their museum exhibits from the story the facts have told. This view is certainly comforting, but sadly far from the truth. Archaeological interpretation is a much more delicate process. Whereas it may at first appear that archaeological facts can speak for themselves, the reality is quite different because each individual archaeologist brings his or her own experience, viewpoints, and ideas into the process of analysis and interpretation. We learn from Dr. Funari that the process is never easy or straightforward. In fact, we often learn as much about ourselves through our archaeological interpretations as we do about the distant past.

In addition to informing us about the archaeological project, Dr. Funari performs the equally important task of stressing that archaeology is not something that only involves the past. True, archaeologists do focus their creative energies on historical times, but the role of archaeology does not end there because archaeology has definite relevance to the present. Because archaeological interpretations can change over time – as both new evidence emerges and as conceptions change – the teaching of archaeology to children and adults is not merely an intellectual pursuit intended for a few,

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well-placed scholars. Dr. Funari emphatically shows us on the contrary that archaeological interpretation matters today. The museum exhibits archaeologists create and the books they publish are intended to provide a specific view of history. The very act of presenting the information instills in it a certain power, an importance that seems given and correct.

But archaeological interpretations would never change if they were absolutely correct in the first place. As we change, so do our understandings of the past.

Dr. Funari is to be congratulated for presenting this important introduction to archaeology. It is through such important acts that we all learn more about the ourselves and our histories.

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