

Great Excavations: Tales of Early Southwestern Archaeology, 1888-1939, School of American Research Press, 1995, Paper.

by

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Great Excavations: Tales of Early Southwestern Archaeology, 1888-1939, is an “intentionally selective” account of eight major archaeological expeditions to the Southwest in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It succeeds in achieving the goals set forth in the prologue. The reader is taken on an “armchair tour” of early Southwestern excavations in the hope that the resulting “basic understanding of what the early archaeologists did” will stimulate a desire to “learn more about the intriguing prehistory of the Southwest” (pp. xiii). As a student of the history of North American archaeology, I would be amiss to speak for Elliott’s “layperson” audience, but my suspicion is that her presentation will indeed stimulate those readers. As an archaeologist, I thoroughly enjoyed this book, and it may well be that Elliott’s journalistic approach makes this book more enjoyable because she is able to remain above the level of detail that often burden archaeologists’ accounts of these expeditions. I must temper this statement by noting that Elliott’s journalistic hyperbole and tendency to oversimplify complex research and analysis are at times discomfoting.

Eight stand-alone chapters chronicle in rough chronological order early field research at Cliff Palace, Pueblo Bonito, Aztec Ruin, Hawikuh, Pueblo Bonito, Snaketown, Awatovi, and the field research conducted by the Rainbow Bridge - Monument Valley Expedition. Experts on any one of these expeditions or sites might be disappointed by inaccuracies that most other readers probably would not notice. Archaeologists may also find minor lapses in logic, imprecise terminology, and a lack of citation that make it difficult to follow Elliott’s reasoning, though to be fair these oversights probably would not concern the lay reader to whom this book is directed. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand and reconstruct the inference that a “consequence of the lack of scientific method was that the dimension of time in Southwestern archaeology remained a mystery” (p.28). Elliott also confuses the terms “precision” and “accuracy” in arguing that “without stratigraphy the study of prehistoric chronology in the Southwest would have no basis for precision” (p. 35). In most situations, stratigraphic analysis leads to accurate though not necessarily precise chronologies.

Elliott’s treatment of the development of A. E. Douglass’ tree-ring chronology (p. 128, 142) perpetuates the conventional wisdom regarding the bridging of the gap. “HH-39” is not in fact a “piece of prehistoric wood,” but it was a “surface-charred end of an ancient roof timber, the heartwood [that was] unaffected by the heat long since turned to dust” (Haury 1962:13). That is, it was a charcoal remnant of a roof beam that was missing an untold number of inner and outer rings (Douglass 1935 :36-37). I admit this is a highly technical point, but perhaps more importantly, HH-39 was not discovered by Lyndon Hargrave and Emil Haury (p. 128), or by Haury and Hargrave (p. 142), as the “HH” designation and conventional wisdom suggests. HH-39 was in fact “recovered” by Neil Judd (Douglass’ research files at the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research; Folder “Third Beam Expedition” Number 2 of 2). Judd and Douglass had arrived at the Whipple Ruin from Flagstaff early late in the morning of June 22, 1929, just in time for the excavation of HH-39 (Haury 1962).

Inclusion of the obviously staged photograph of Hargrave (p.202) gives the impression that he was a dendrochronologist, or was at least interested in the study of tree-ring sequences. Elliott certainly cannot be faulted for the content of a photograph taken six decades ago, though I believe she credits Hargrave with

more concern for dendrochronological analysis than I believe he would have been comfortable with. Elliott notes (p.203) that Hargrave used "ceramic and tree-ring data . . . to piece together the history of the construction of individual cliff houses" visited by the Rainbow Bridge - Monument Valley Expedition in 1933. In fact, Hargrave (1935a) considered ceramic data to be "of first importance" in determining "the pueblo development" and "time of occupation," but tree-ring dates are used for bracketing purposes only. For instance, tree-ring dates for Kiet Siel are used only to bracket occupation of the site: "1116+10 -1284 A.D." (Hargrave 1935a:29). Throughout his career, Hargrave's interest in dendrochronology was as a field collector of beam material (Hargrave 1935b) and as an archaeologist who needed tree-ring dates to frame his analyses and crossdate the ceramic sequences with which he worked. He did not personally conduct tree-ring analysis, nor did he use tree-ring dates for the kind of sophisticated analysis Elliott implies. Indeed, the only archaeologist or dendrochronologist of that era who used tree-ring dating to "piece together the history of construction of individual cliff houses" was Haury at Canyon Creek Ruin (Haury 1934). This kind of intensive dendrochronologically-based architectural analysis was not replicated until Jeffrey S. Dean analyzed construction sequences at Betatakin and Kiet Siel three decades later (Dean 1970).

Taken together, the 132 photographs are well-integrated and greatly enhance Elliott's text. Many of them provide an indication of the difficult fieldwork conditions and logistical situations faced by the expeditions. Many archaeologists interested in the history of the discipline would like to have taken to the field in "Old Blue" or "Pecos Black," the famous vehicles of the Pecos expedition (p.43), or to have sampled John Wetherill's "famous hot biscuits" (p.201). Most of us would not, however, have put ourselves in the precarious position in which Jesse Nusbaum is photographed while restoring Balcony House in 1910 (p.16). Methodologically, note that excavators at Aztec Ruin screened fill in the second decade of this century (p.62). Prejudices of the day are revealed in some photographs (p. 106, 115) in which Native American work crews are photographed but not individually identified, even in photos in which Anglos are named (p. 107). Notable exceptions in this regard are J. O. Brew's Hopi crew at Awatovi (p. 169) and the 1964-65 excavation crew at Snaketown (p. 159).

As a student of the history of archaeology, I highly recommend this book, if for no other reason than it presents in one place interesting and lucid summaries of major expeditions about which all Southwestern archaeologists should have some familiarity. Elliott's journalistic background and writing style allow her to imbue these accounts with a certain enthusiasm and feeling that is not usually conveyed in scholarly accounts. For this reason, the book might serve well as a supplemental text for lower-level undergraduate courses. Interested laypersons will certainly enjoy this book. One wishes that a journalist might once present a popular account of archaeological research without using worn-out terms like "meticulous" and "painstaking" to describe archaeological research that leads to otherwise unidentified "significant scientific discoveries." Nevertheless, archaeologists who are willing to permit Elliott a bit of journalistic latitude should sit back, relax, and enjoy *Great Excavations*.

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An Encyclopedia of the History of Classical Archaeology, edited by Nancy Thomson de Grummond, Greenwood Press, Westport, 2 volumes, cloth, iv-xxiv, 1330 pages, selected photographs, \$245.00.

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Nancy Thomson de Grummond has done a tremendous service for those scholars interested in the history of Classical Archaeology. In the 1330 pages that are the two handsome volumes that make up the set, Thomson de Grummond provides a series of biographical sketches of many classical archaeologists and discussions of archaeological site locations which provide an excellent and concise look at the conduct of classical archaeology through time. The biographical sketches contained in the volumes represent both the lay and professional classical archaeologist. Represented in the volumes are archaeologists from established religious orders in the classical world as well as those who derived their interest in classical archaeology from the burgeoning interest in the development of the European scientific community. In addition, discussion of selected artifact discoveries are included in both volumes to round out the interest that anyone might have in the origins and development of classical archaeology.

Readers of the volumes will find, for example, an excellent biographical sketch of Max von Bahrfeldt (1856-1936), a German humanist and one of the first "modern" students of Roman coinage. These and other like biographical sketches do much more for the reader and the interested researcher. Not only are the familiar names of classical archaeologists included in the volume, but also the biographical histories of less well-known workers who really form the backbone of what we now consider as being "Classical Archaeology." Thomson de Grummond has recognized this most valuable asset in her "encyclopedia" of Classical Archaeology. The reader and researcher will find these two volumes in the set an indispensable starting point upon which to continue research in or a detailed interest in Classical Archaeology. For those working on the history of Classical Archaeology, these two volumes must be a part of one's personal library. *An Encyclopedia of the History of Classical Archaeology* is a must for any reference department in a college, university, or public library!