

NEW DIRECTIONS

For over ninety years The University Museum has been digging ancient sites and studying contemporary traditional communities virtually all over the world. Who decided what to investigate and how were these decisions taken? Sometimes, perhaps usually, the decision was taken by the curator concerned and reflected his or her personal research interests; sometimes the decision may have been made by the director; sometimes, perhaps, by a member of the Board of Managers. The essential element has been a personnel decision (however ultimately ratified) and a personal commitment.

Precisely because of the element of commitment, this procedure has worked pretty well, particularly when the decisions have been taken by the curator who was going to do the work and commit his or her future to it. For some time, however, it has been clear that this simple procedure is not going to work so well in the future: anthropological field research is getting too complex, and the need to react to the destruction of sites and the transformation of traditional societies too urgent, the operations too expensive and the available resources too limited, for institutional commitments to long-term research to be taken on a purely personal basis. In future, decisions leading to a massive use of institutional resources and involving international agreements will have to take a whole range of factors into consideration. Above all, they will no longer be purely personal but rather corporate decisions, which will require give and take by all concerned.

There are many matters that have to be considered. What is the specific objective of the proposed project? How does it fit in with the current state of research in the particular field? Does it make sense as part of the Museum's general research orientation, so that results may cross-fertilize other areas of the Museum's work? For example, many are working on urban projects in various parts of the world: should we therefore consciously stress urban research in order to build a particular institutional competence and cross-cultural facility in this field? Does a project reflect the need to salvage information before it is destroyed? And does it reasonably echo the needs and interests of a host country in its own society, in its own cultural development, and in the education of its own scholars?

In deciding on projects and setting the questions to be asked, these and other considerations will all have to be examined in future. None of this is simple. But with limited resources of manpower and money, the objectives have to be precise, supported by everyone involved, capable of achievement, and significant in their potential. What kind of answers we get—and what we do with them—needs further comment in the next *Expedition*.

Recent events at the University mean that the words above are my last contribution to this column as Director of The University Museum. In recent issues I have tried to explore the challenges which face the Museum in conducting a world-wide program of field research in archaeology and anthropology in the rapidly changing intellectual and geopolitical conditions of the eve of the twenty-first century. The way in which the Museum faces these issues, conducts its fieldwork, and publishes its results will determine its future as one of the world's great powerhouses of research into the past achievements and future potential of mankind.

The Museum's future as a museum in the stricter sense will be settled closer to home and, in all important matters, on this campus. As a museum, The University Museum's first responsibility is to preserve and to present (to the general public, and to students and scholars alike) the great systematic collections of archaeological and ethnographic materials which are at once its greatest joy and its most serious concern. On a university campus above all, where the purpose of life is to acquire and impart knowledge, the Museum's two great tasks of preservation and presentation deserve intellectual, material, and moral support. The degree to which The University Museum receives that support will be both the decisive factor in the future of the Museum itself and a scale against which the University of Pennsylvania's own claims to greatness may be judged.

Martin Biddle
Director, 1977-81