NEW DIRECTIONS

The Director writes

In the last issue of Expedition I wrote about the University Museum's existing archives and their care. This time I want to take the question of archives rather further and link it to current and future field research and publication.

Two of the many problems facing archaeological field work, particularly excavation, concern us here. Properly conducted excavations are producing ever greater quantities of increasingly detailed data; and at the same time the costs of publication—printing and binding—are increasing even faster than inflation. Various solutions to the cost problem have been tried, with varying degrees of success. Here I want to look at the other half of the problem: how much of the data should we publish? This matter is obviously tied up with the question of how many people want the data and at what level of detail. But it is also very closely involved with a view I hold which is that excavation field records and the papers resulting from their subsequent analysis are, or should be, public documents compiled with a degree of system and thought for other people's needs, which will allow them to be consulted by colleagues now and in the future. If field and analytical records are compiled this way, and are subsequently kept in a publicly accessible archive, as the result of an on-going administrative process—which is just what archives are technically—many possibilities follow.

For example, we can reach sensible decisions on how much we need to publish, always knowing that the detail is available in an organized and accessible archive. We can thus face the question: 'how many people have to have this or that in expensive letter-press?' The funds thus released should enable us to publish both more rapidly and to a higher standard than would otherwise be possible, the material which must reach a wide scholarly audience.

But there is more to it than that: with such an archive, and with fully adequate copying facilities of the necessary kinds, we can make available all our recorded and analysed data for re-interrogation by current and subsequent generations of scholars in a way which is not possible even with apparently fully published excavations. So the creation of a University Museum archive, under professional care, is not a backward-looking concern for the Museum's records, important as they are. Rather it is an essential step in meeting the obligations inescapable in future field research.

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