MUSINGS AND VISIONS FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

The University of Pennsylvania Museum recently presented a small but very important temporary exhibit entitled "Illuminating the Past: The Art and Artists of the Ban Chiang Project." The purpose of this exhibit, which was superbly curated by Dr. Joyce White (Research Specialist in the Asian Section) and ably installed by Raymond Rolfe, was to show how archaeologists prepare their final reports after an excavation has been completed (in this case at Ban Chiang in Thailand). Although most public attention is understandably focused on the fieldwork component of archaeological research, the lesser-known and understood analysis and publication preparation phases are just as significant.

The exhibit featured the work that artists and draftspersons do to convert site plans and profiles into publishable line drawings and to render as understandable pictures the artifacts uncovered during excavation. The latter often take not only great skill but also ingenuity, as in the case, for example, of depicting stone tools and the kinds of chipping ancient peoples employed to manufacture them.

Although the pre-publication phase of an archaeological project is decidedly unglamorous, it is essential. Excavation without publication has little value, no matter how important the finding. Moreover, excavation involves the destruction of archaeological contexts that cannot be restored. If the analysis and publication of the excavated materials is not undertaken, then archaeologists lose to themselves open to the charge that their work is not much different than looting.

Financial support for archaeological analysis, report preparation, and publication is often much more difficult to obtain than for field research, and the former activities can be relatively expensive. What this means for our Museum is that we just have to try harder to secure such funding if we are to fulfill our obligations to both the scholarly community and to the general public.

Jeremy A. Sabloff
The Charles K. Williams II Director

From pencil sketch to final inking.

"Illuminating the Past" takes the reader behind the scenes, where sites are prepared for publication.

Pottery vessel from Ban Chiang Burial 71; drawings by Arudeth Anderson

Shells and Society at Tikal, Guatemala

Hattula Moholy-Nagy

Tikal's richly decorated shell and turquoise beads and pendants. The large ceremonial building, Temple II, was decorated with hundreds of unworked marine shell artifacts, fragments of production waste, and debris, were recovered from the University of Pennsylvania Museum's excavations at Tikal. Shell was clearly of importance to the inhabitants of this land-locked city (Figs. 1, 2). Enough data are now available to allow us to think about social contexts: we can try to link the shells from archaeological context to the people who once used them.

Sometimes the shells of freshwater mussels were worked into artifacts, but most of the shell recovered from Tikal was of marine origin intentionally brought into the city. Shell was used primarily for social and ceremonial purposes, and different social groups used it in different ways.

Marine shellfish were probably not a food source for Tikal residents. Local freshwater snails were eaten, but their occurrence at the site varied more by chronology than by social context. It is not certain that land snails were used at all. Accordingly, excavated freshwater and terrestrial snails will not be considered here.

SETTLEMENT AND SOCIETY AT TIKAL

Current views of Tikal's chronology place its initial permanent settlement around 800 B.C., during the Middle Preclassic Period. Towards the end of this period and during the following Late Preclassic Period (circa 350 B.C. to A.D. 250), social ranking developed, with a