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Who Pays For All This?

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An archaeological excavation is a major financial undertaking, whether it is a salvage excavation or a planned, long-term excavation. There are several types of entities that are involved in excavations, such as government agencies (e.g. Israel Antiquities Authority [IAA], the Department of Antiquities of Jordan [DoAJ]), professional organizations (e.g. Israel Exploration Society [IES], American Schools of Oriental Research [ASOR]), academic institutions such as universities and colleges, religious organizations such as certain religious denominations, private individuals, and for profit companies. Each has its own motives and means of financing its operation.

Let's start with the latter; for profit outfits are professional bodies that are engaged in archaeology as a business. The people who work in these companies are trained in archaeology; they can perform the multiple tasks that are required for the job and they are engaged in it for their livelihood, i.e. to make a profit. Sometimes they are referred to as contract archaeologists because they do the job under contract, which they win by bidding against other companies or entities. In the USA, the contracts are usually awarded by the Federal or State governments that are required by law to identify and preserve archaeological/historical sites. These tasks involve surveys and excavations before certain projects can get underway, such as freeways, dams, etc. The money for these projects is provided by the taxpayer through the government. In the Near East, this type of archaeology is referred to as Salvage Archaeology because, in many cases, the archaeological activities are determined by the discovery of sites during certain human activities, such as construction. In this case the excavation is carried out by employees

of the governmental agency in charge of antiquities (see above) or is given to a contract archaeologist, private or an academic institution. In Israel, if the excavation is to be carried out as a result of construction by a private entity, the latter is supposed to finance the work in order to make sure that the land can be released for the intended development.

Some projects are undertaken by private individuals who have the money or can raise it from others who believe in their cause. Most times the ideas that these individuals have are not the result of scholarly research. Since many countries (especially in the Near East) require the excavator to have scholarly background and training in order to acquire a permit, these private individuals have to enlist the participation of a qualified individual or institution for this purpose. However, there are times that private wealthy individuals support genuine scholarly projects because of their interest in the topic, site or region that are studied without trying to advance a particular point of view. This could be considered as a branch of philanthropy.

When it comes to the Near East, because of their interest in the Bible and in biblical history, some religious organizations or whole denominations become involved in archaeological research. This can be done by initiating their own projects or by supporting ones that can help in advancing their religious ideas. Here again, to receive a permit the organization needs to employ a qualified individual and staff, which can be done through cooperation with an academic institution (see below).

The majority of archaeological work is done by academic and other scholarly institutions, such as local and foreign universities and museums. Presently, the role played by professional organizations, such as IES, ASOR, and others national schools (British, French, German) is minimal. Although in the past these organizations were the leaders in the field, today they join forces with academic institutions in a supporting role, financially and otherwise. The projects initiated and carried out by academic and scholarly entities are long range and require a research design, which outlines the questions to be studied and the methods to be employed. These projects require a large team that, in addition to the field staff, includes numerous specialists who deal with a variety of topics (such as geology, faunal

archaeology, palaeo-botany, numismatics), and uses the services of artists, architects, and laboratories (such as those specializing in radiocarbon dating, thermoluminescence [TL]), and many, many more. All of these specializations need a huge budget, the sources of which are varied. Several universities, especially those having institutes and/or departments of archaeology, provide financial help for field and lab work. Directors of excavations apply to government sources (in the USA, the National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH], National Science Foundation [NSF]), or private individuals and foundations such as the White-Levy Program. Another way of funding an archaeological project is by offering an academic program in the field and charging tuition for awarding credits. Many projects form a consortium of schools in which members contribute funds to the project in return for sending students and faculty to participate in the work. Depending on the consortium, the member institutions receive certain benefits in return for their financial participation.

From the above brief description it is apparent that an archaeological project is a very complex and costly undertaking. The funding comes from a variety of sources depending on the organization that carries out the project, its nationality, and the country where it is being carried out.

Suggested Reading:

For additional information, see the following websites:

DoAJ—<http://www.doa.gov.jo/En/index.php>; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Institute of Archaeology—<http://archaeology.huji.ac.il/>; IAA—<http://www.antiquities.org.il/>; Mississippi State University/Cobb Institute of Archaeology—<http://www.cobb.msstate.edu/>; NEH—<http://www.neh.gov/>; NSF—<http://www.nsf.gov/>; Shelby White & Leon Levy Program—<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~semitic/wl/index.html>

See Also:

“Who Owns the Artifacts Found?”; “How Do Artifacts End Up In Museums?” and “How is Archaeology Used to Support Nationalism?”