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REVIEWS

Justin Pollard 2008. *The Story of Archaeology in 50 Great Discoveries*. Quercus, London. ISBN 10 1 84724 183 2. 256 pp, figs., glossary, index. Cloth. \$49.99.

Mat Campbell, CFG Heritage

This attractive coffee table volume does a good job of doing just what the title promises. Its 50 discoveries are given in chronological order of discovery, which is to say, the earliest discovered comes first. This, I was surprised to learn, is Angkor Wat, discovered by Antonio da Magdelena in 1586, a mere 155 years after its abandonment as the Khmer capital. Readers will, of course, be well aware that ‘discovered’ in this context is an ambiguous term at best – Angkor was, after all, still inhabited at the time, and Pollard himself puts the same word in the same single quotes. This is the story of archaeological, or at least Western, discovery. The second site covered is itself a rediscovery, of sorts. Known already to locals as La Civitá, Herculaneum and Pompeii were first brought to wider attention through ‘discovery’ in 1594.

The third discovery in the book was has an early date – Rapanui, Easter Island, discovered by Jakob Roggeveen in 1722. This is the only discovery of the 50 from our part of the world (apart from Lake Mungo in Australia), and also one of the few I can admit to knowing much about. This being so, there is at least one clear error of fact in the book, when Pollard asserts that “when Roggeveen arrived on the island no moai remained standing...” – in fact it was not until Cook’s visit half a century later that there is a record of toppled statues, and even then the majority were still standing. One hopes that such failures of fact-checking are few – it is through popular books such as this that these kinds of errors creep into the public domain.

Every short chapter is accompanied by a time line outlining the history of the site or culture from beginnings to Western discovery and on to the history of archaeological investigation. Many have side bars, often a full page, exploring and explaining various aspects of the archaeological endeavour. The side bar for Easter Island, for instance, is on experimental archaeology, namely Thor Heyerdahl’s Kon Tiki expedition, not, perhaps, the example you or I might have chosen, but one well suited to presenting the romance of our profession to a wider audience. Thankfully the description is fair and balanced. Sites such as Machu Picchu or Tutankhamen’s tomb have side bars about their discoverers. Other are more informative. The Nazca lines article has a side bar about the

use of aerial photography. More interestingly, the Çatalhöyük article has a side bar about theoretical archaeology, which is not bad for a one page summary of the shift from culture history to new archaeology to post-processualism, the theoretical stance of the site's current excavator, Ian Hodder.

As the title indicates, there are 50 discoveries described here (not quite true – there are actually 49 sites/cultures and one man – Giovanni Belzoni, more fascinating, romantic and mad than many a stock site). Many of the usual suspects are here, though we could all find a favourite international discovery that we might think ought to be included – mine, for instance, would be Lepenski Vir. And of course various famous sites such as Giza or Stonehenge have never been lost and so have, quite successfully, resisted Western discovery.

And there are sites that I knew very little about. For instance, I did not know that the site of the Battle of the Teutoberg Forest had been discovered, though I expect it is more controversial than Pollard indicates. One particularly intriguing discovery is that of two squadrons of US Airforce P-38 Lightnings and B-17 Flying Fortresses forced to land on a Greenland glacier in 1942. One of these was excavated from beneath 80 m of ice in 1990 – an object lesson that despite the best intentions of our political lords and masters, archaeology did not come to a full stop on 31 December 1899.

Given that none can be given more than five pages, and all are well illustrated, 50 is a lot to fit in and none are described in great detail. This is a book to dip into, but not really a book for practicing archaeologists. Rather, if you are looking for a gift for your nieces and nephews, or aunts and uncles, to demonstrate the romance of the arcane profession you have chosen (“No aunt, not dinosaur bones...”), you could do much worse than this, pitched nicely at its market but not talking down to anyone.