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Archaeology

Archaeology only developed as a true science in the nineteenth century. Prior to that, its roots are in the plunder of wars and conquests, in the exotica amassed by western explorers and, in the eighteenth century, by well-to-do cultural 'tourists' traveling to the Orient or to the Mediterranean in pursuit of an idea of classicism.

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Archaeology proper developed out of the realization that it was more informative to study objects in their contexts, rather than in isolation, and that, in the earth beneath us, the remains of generations are preserved in successive levels, which can be identified and analyzed through the technique of stratigraphy. What had been an amassing of booty, or an egocentric accumulation of private collections, became the self-effacing vocation of the archaeologist; the names of even the most eminent, such as Sir Leonard Wooley, the great archaeologist of the kingdom of Ur in Sumeria are rarely mentioned.

Many titles in this section deal with the great areas of archaeological discovery: the temples and cities of Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean, or the cathedrals, castles, churches and houses of medieval Europe. Others, particularly in the English Heritage series (made for young learners, but very worthwhile for their parents and teachers too), open up the principles of archaeology into a broadly creative, fact-gathering attitude to the world all around us. Even our own homes can be studied as 'historic' sites...



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