

Books

The Young Oxford Book of Archaeology, by Norah Moloney. *Oxford University Press*, 1995. 160 pp., many illus. (black-and-white and colour), glossary, index. £12.99.

IN TODAY'S world of video, TV and film, how do you draw a child to the printed page which isn't animated and has words written all over it waiting to be read? And how, more particularly, do you introduce that child to archaeology, a subject that is only concerned with bones and picking over the debris left behind, through the medium of a book? Norah Moloney has sought to tackle these points with her volume *The Young Oxford Book of Archaeology*, which is the fifth in a series of 'young' books aimed at the 12+ age group, published by OUP to an impressively high standard. Two reviewers (aged 14 and 13) gave the following report:

Clear, colourful photos and reconstruction pictures	Smart design
Good use of maps	Easy to follow
Explains in detail	Interesting
Clear text	Informative

This indicates quite clearly that the book contains a certain 'something' which marks out a piece of work as *good* rather than *average*.

Two things strike you when the book is first open – the number of illustrations and the amount of text. The latter is divided into three unequal sections. The first, *Decoding the evidence*, deals with what might loosely be termed the mechanics of the subject having initially discussed the vexed question of 'What is archaeology?'. The opening sentence sets the tone

'Archaeology is rather like trying to put together a puzzle from which most of the pieces are missing.'

From this beginning, the reader then covers the range and survival of evidence available (bones, teeth, insect, pollen and plant remains), locating and excavating sites and post-ex. studies. All this before looking at the complexities of relative and absolute dating. The section on typology, using 20th-century American cars, is particularly appealing. What is very clear is that Dr. Moloney, while aware of the age of her audience, has not 'pulled any punches' as to the range of information that she is giving them. How would you describe potassium-argon dating and thermoluminescence to 12-year-olds without either blinding them with science or speaking down to them?

This approach continues into the second section, *A Journey through time*, which is the largest part of

the book. Working her way from *Australopithecus* of 3.8 mya to today's American Garbage Product, Dr. Moloney describes different methods of adaptation to changing environments and experimentation to new ideas, as well as examining the artefacts and monuments that remain for the information they can give. This section benefits from a well-chosen series of case studies which range from the better known (for example, Pompeii and Sutton Hoo) to the unfamiliar (for example, Arnhem Land and Mezhirich). The drawn maps and diagrams are for the most part very clear, but one would have wished for a little less frenetic activity in the Nile scene (p. 70-1) and clarification of the 'smudges' on the plan of the Bay of Naples (p. 86). The amount and scope of the information in this middle section is immense, given that it is accomplished in less than 90 pages.

Having informed the reader of the why, how and where of archaeology, Dr. Moloney discusses what can be learnt from it all in the final section by examining art, pottery and writing as well as burial practices. It is a shame that the excellent introduction did not have its counterpart conclusion at the end of the book, drawing all the threads together in a grand climax. That said, the glossary is very informative and the index thorough. A bibliography, even at a minimal level, really ought to have been included, but the omission was an editorial decision.

The illustrations can only be described as copious, with several to each page, all pertinent to the very thorough text. Examples have been used from around the world, no doubt to illustrate the global nature of archaeology and cover both known and not so well known. (The fieldwalking shot on p. 16 made my back ache at the thought!) The photographs tell the story quite clearly themselves, so a younger child who might have difficulty with the vocabulary would learn a lot just looking at them.

The book is well presented, exciting, and full of facts and information. It fulfils a need in bridging the gap between history lesson at school and archaeology. Dr. Moloney's experiences of teaching and her love of archaeology combine well to produce a volume which has excited adults as well as the recommended 12+ age group. Speaking as one with definite child-like tendencies, I have to say that the book is eminently suitable for children of all ages.

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