

DOROTHY KING'S DAY ...

July 29, 2011 phdiva Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011 Abbott, Anthropology, archaeologist, Archaeology, British Museum, Copenhagen, Dorothy King, Egypt, Fleming, Fleming Companies, France, http, http://phdiva.blogspot.com, Indie, investment bank, Jesper Jensen, Kathryn M. Meyers, Lara Croft, Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, Mummy, Naples, Oakland Raiders, Onassis Foundation, Peter Schulz, pneumonia, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Rome, Tomb of Hecatomnus, Tomb Raider - Lloyd Levin, Twitter, Twitter Inc., Vergina, Yinxu

I grew up watching the Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark movies. Then later came Lara Croft the Tomb Raider – Lloyd Levin is an amazing filmmaker and storyteller, but I'm sure he wouldn't pretend they have anything to do with reality* ... and the 'reality' of archaeologists' days is what The Day of Archaeology is about.

We know that digging up old tombs has been going on forever – the Abbott Papyrus in the British Museum deals with tomb looters, and several Roman legal texts deal with the looting of tombs and sanctuaries. In the Medieval period Western Europeans thought the ground mummies were a magic cure-all, so there first developed a thriving trade in real mummies being bug up and shipped, and then mummy faking in Egypt (the Muslims were slightly repulsed by this European penchant for cannibalism, but if Francois I of France wanted to wear a purse with ground mummy around his neck for emergencies, then they were happy to take his cash)+. The ancient Egyptians were looking for loot to sell off for cash, the Romans were more interested in collecting. Collecting and archaeology went hand in hand for much of the modern period, with excavations undertaken in Rome during the Renaissance, then around the bay of Naples in the 18th century, as much to find relics of the past as to understand it. Nowadays archaeologist hunting for relics and tomb raiding in the manner of Indie and Lara is frowned upon.

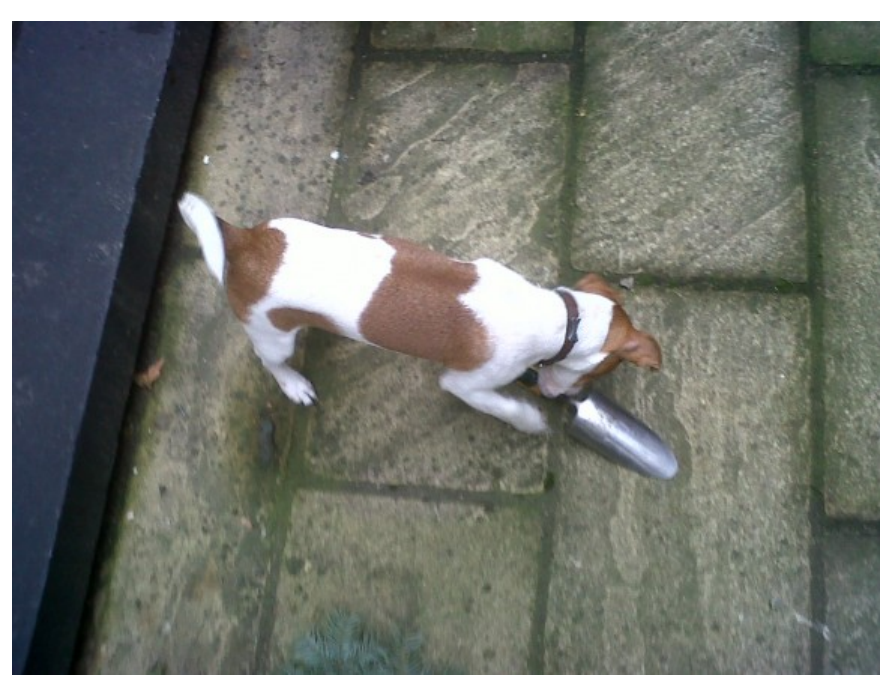
I first 'dug' in the summer of 1981. My brother had just been born and I was sent to cousins in the country. Aged 8, I got them to excavate their garden and our 'finds' are now in the storeroom of the local museum. (At French schools, we had learnt about the Gauls and Romans, so this seemed normal). My first 'real' dig was at Sparta, where the team worked on the theatre. I'm still proudest of my personal find there: the remains of the Augustan theatre built into the foundations of the later stage buildings (I was meant to be drawing an elevation, tied away the ground to even it out at the bottom, and hey presto out popped some finely carved marble fragments). These days I have links with a few excavations, but tend not to dig day to day.

I had originally planned to study History of Art, but seriously fluffed my Courtauld interview due to pneumonia, so I thought I'd study Classics instead since that was the Renaissance education and would give me insight into their mind-set. I tried a few other jobs, but I did post-grad partly because I was raising my baby brother, and I'd managed to schedule my undergrad courses around his school runs, and a PhD seemed easier to work around that than a job at an investment bank. I'll never make as much money at archaeology as I would have at Fleming's but I love what I do, and nobody that chooses to do archaeology can be all that interested in money. I did a post-doc at the ASCSA generously funded by the Onassis Foundation, then went on from there.

The two themes of many of the posts that make up The Day of Archaeology seem to be about emails / paperwork and children. I managed to combine the two this morning thanks to my trusty Blackberry, without which I couldn't have answered hundreds of emails from colleagues (academics love to cc each other) about a few exhibitions that might or might not happen in the future, working with three museums on two continents. I also love Twitter (www.twitter.com/DorothyKing) and last night, for example, ended up discussing women gladiators with www.twitter.com/sarahebond and www.twitter.com/rogueclassicist. Other recent Twitter discussions have included annoyance at portraits of random women being labelled Cleopatra and assorted other topics.



The “children” part is that ... this photo of me I took at lunchtime might suggest khakis and archaeology, but ... the dirt is the result of dogs and children, and a nanny failing to turn up ... although Ellie the Jack Russell is proving rather fond of “her” trowel ...



I've been blogging for years, as it's a handy way of sharing ideas and research, and the Blackberry is also handy for that: <http://phdiva.blogspot.com> ... I keep track of info through links, so that version of this post on my blog will have lots of links to others' work. Maybe I should have followed the more traditional career path, but these days I am a Fellow of or on the Board of assorted projects / institutions.

The main project keeping me busy these days is trying to set up a database of looted archaeological material to help track antiquities that went missing in wars or the looting of sites or museums. At the moment photos of some objects are available various places, but there is no central place on the web where someone can look up an item they see and suspect is dodgy to see if anyone has reported it missing. Previous attempts to create such a database have failed, so this may all turn out to be a house of cards but I feel I have to give it a go. I'm talking to museums, universities, governments, law enforcement agencies, and we'll be looking for volunteers to help with it – so if you want to get involved, just drop me a line.

Jesper Jensen and Peter Schulz have organised a conference in Copenhagen next May, and kindly invited me to speak, so I'm also working up my paper for it: Kings, Tombs and Ruler Cult Before Alexander: new evidence from Vergina and Caria. I'm re-examining the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus based on the monuments that copied it, and on the newly found sarcophagus in the Tomb of Hecatomnus his father at Mylasa. I also think I've identified Mausolus' mother as a woman named ABA, based on an inscription.

So anyway, that's my day of archaeology on a typical summer holiday day ... dogs, children, answering emails, chatting with colleagues, trying to do some research, trying to get people to collaborate on projects – no tomb raiding or fighting Nazis.

Dorothy King

* = I was thrilled to read that not only does Michigan State grad student Kathryn M. Meyers blog at Bones Don't Lie, but she also works on video games to make the archaeologists more “real” ... (if she's interested in research, I've done high kicks in four inch wedges, so that bit is very possible)

+ = I wrote more about the mummy trade in my 2006 book, The Elgin Marbles