

KAREL SKLENAR, Archaeology in Central Europe: the first 500 years. Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1983. 182pp £16.50 (Hard) ISBN 0-7185-1204-9

Reviewed by Nick Merriman

This book is the first account of the history of Central European archaeology, and one which is long overdue. The areas covered are Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and parts of Yugoslavia and Rumania. The writer is a Czech and not unsurprisingly there is a slight bias towards his country, and, perhaps because of language barriers, little emphasis is given to Hungary, Yugoslavia, or Rumania.

The book is divided into five sections dealing broadly with the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Positivism and Typological Synthesis, each well illustrated with maps, photographs and contemporary plates, but references are untraceable.

Although the main themes of the history of archaeology in Central Europe are familiar ones, their particular manifestation in this area provides an illuminating comparison to Northern and Western Europe. In Central Europe the Renaissance came earlier, stimulated to a large extent by the presence of Italian humanists in Central European universities (international movement of scholars being a recurrent feature of Central European academic life). However, its effects were much less profound than in the west because, while in the latter area economic and social developments moved towards capitalism, in Central Europe after an initial setback the feudal system retained its tight grip on society, allowing for little economic or cultural development.

This pattern of conservatism also prevented some of the more progressive ideas which shaped the course of archaeology from being accepted at an early stage in Central Europe. Sklenar suggests, for example, that the Three-Age system and the evolutionary approach to the past were played down due to German hostility towards Denmark and on the personal authority of leading Christian academics respectively.

The very nature of Central Europe with its hotch-potch of different ethnic and linguistic groups and fluid political boundaries has meant that archaeology has always been much more politically oriented than that practised in North-western Europe. In Central Europe more than anywhere else in Europe it became important at a very early stage for ethnic groups to assert their identity by demonstrating continuity of occupation of a certain territory from prehistoric times onwards. Sklenar shows, for example, how the anomalous position of the Hungarians in the region gave rise to a sense of nationhood amongst them from as early as the fourteenth century.

The whole book is pervaded with this overriding theme of archaeology and nationalism or ethnic identity. The author traces this from the early philological battles between 'Slavists' and 'Germanists', the formulation of the concept of the 'Indo-Germans', through Vogel's attempts to trace ethnic identity through material remains and the development of the 'culture concept', to Kossinna's propagation of archaeology as an ideological weapon for expansionist governments. Given this background, the perversion of archaeological evidence by the Nazis seems a logical conclusion, and it is sobering

to think that this was the period of greatest expansion and interest in archaeology.

As archaeology in Central Europe seems always to have had a much more directly public-oriented function than in north-west Europe, much emphasis has been placed on the presentation of the past. It is good to see, then, that Sklenar does not confine himself to a discussion of the history of archaeology in the narrow academic sense; he also deals with museums, with popular publications, local societies, reconstruction of sites, conservation and legislation. His analysis does however seem to have the implicit message that a public-oriented archaeology, in Central Europe at least, will always involve manipulating the past for some political means, and that in order for a scientific archaeology to progress, it must free itself of the need to serve the public. One oft-voiced justification for archaeology is that it provides roots for a people. At a time when British archaeology is trying to become more public oriented, and history teaching in schools is being revised, the history of archaeology in Central Europe can provide a warning against the excesses to which such philosophies could lead, i.e. nationalism and chauvinism. However, there is no necessary antithesis between academic archaeology and public archaeology because the presentation of archaeology can emphasise not national differences but international similarities.

Unfortunately Sklenar's history finishes at 1945, just as he sees archaeology in Central Europe freed of the shackles of political manipulation' and the 'new archaeology' are only mentioned in passing: it would have been much more interesting to have an account of the development of archaeology over the post-war years to see whether it really has

been a 'new epoch' as Sklenar suggests.

As it stands, however, the book is a pioneer in its field, and shall remain the standard work for a long time to come.

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F. IKAWA-SMITH (ED.), Early Palaeolithic in South and East Asia. Mouton, The Hague, 1978. 390pp. £42.50 (Hard) ISBN 90-279-7899-9

Reviewed by Tim Reynolds

This volume is one of a series published by Mouton entitled 'World Anthropology'. This particular work is based on a series of seminars held in 1973 which drew together researchers specialising in South and East Asia. The series was intended to collect together anthropologists from as wide a cultural background as possible. But, despite these admirable aims, the bulk of the papers are produced either by Westerners or from areas strongly influenced by the West. It reflects rather than overcomes the problems produced by the varied politics of the region (see Borikovsky). Indeed, the state of archaeological research also does this: the stronger the western influence, the more developed is the archaeological study. One problem for the Palaeolithic archaeology of this region is that tourism provides an important source of revenue and so later archaeological sites tend to draw off a large part of potential research funding. The area covered includes great geographical and economic variability and is not a naturally defined region.

The book is divided into five parts: Insular south-east Asia, Continental southern Asia, North-east Asia, New World Implications and a Review. It is well-ordered