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Writing about Archaeology

In this book, Graham Connah offers an overview of archaeological authorship: its diversity, its challenges and its methodology. Based on his own experiences, he presents his personal views about the task of writing about archaeology. The book is not intended to be a technical manual. Instead, Connah aims to encourage archaeologists who write about their subject to think about the process of writing. He writes with the beginning author in mind, but the book will be of interest to all archaeologists who plan to publish their work. Connah's overall premise is that those who write about archaeology need to be less concerned with content and more concerned with how they present it. It is not enough to be a good archaeologist. One must also become a good writer and be able to communicate effectively. Archaeology, he argues, is above all a literary discipline.

Graham Connah is a Visiting Fellow in the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University in Canberra. A scholar of the archaeology of Africa and Australia, he is the author of eight books and founded the journal *Australasian Historical Archaeology*.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521688512

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First published 2010

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Connah, Graham.

Writing about archaeology / Graham Connah.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-86850-1 (hbk.) – ISBN 978-0-521-68851-2 (pbk.)

1. Archaeology—Authorship. 2. Written communication.

3. Archaeological literature—Publishing. I. Title.

CC82.C66 2010

930.1—dc22 2009022685

ISBN 978-0-521-86850-1 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-68851-2 Paperback

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Dedicated to the memory of

George Burr Perrett
Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge,
from 1920 to 1964

'O! that mine enemy would write a book! has been a well known prayer against an enemy. I had written a book, and it has furnished matter for abuse for want of something better.'

Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, in a letter to Dr Samuel Brown, 25 March 1798 (Peden 1955: xxiv).

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I wrote this book in 2007 and 2008 following a suggestion in 2005 by Simon Whitmore, formerly an editor at Cambridge University Press. I am grateful to him and to Beatrice Rehl, the present Humanities and Social Sciences editor at Cambridge University Press, New York, for their advice and patience during its gestation. It has been a great pleasure to continue my long and fruitful association with the Press.

It seemed arrogant and patronizing to write a book telling other archaeologists how to write, and I have remained acutely aware of this throughout my work on it. However, in no way should this book be thought of as a manual of instructions. This is certainly not intended. Rather the book consists of my own reflections on the task after more than a half-century of attempting to write about archaeology. My intention has been to encourage archaeological authors to think more critically about what they do and how they do it. I suggest that in order to write well about archaeology it is not enough to be an archaeologist; one must also learn how to write and each of us might achieve

this in our own way. This opinion has been shaped by my contact with many other members of the archaeological profession over the years, too many to acknowledge here but all owed a debt of gratitude; to an extent each one of us is the sum of those we have known. With this in mind the book is dedicated not to an archaeologist but to the memory of an historian, remembered for his insistence on rigour in writing.

I would like to thank no less than five anonymous publisher's 'readers' who commented on my proposal for the book and whose opinions influenced the way that it was subsequently written. I am also particularly grateful to David Pearson of the National Library of Australia, Canberra, and to Michael Westaway of the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, who both commented on an earlier version of the book and whose suggestions have influenced its final form.

The illustrations included in Chapter 6 need some explanation. With such a limited number, it was clearly impossible to provide comprehensive examples of the great diversity of visual material used in archaeological publications. I spent many days making a selection that can only be representative in the most general way, but the images that I chose were all ones that caught my attention and *told* me something, as I think archaeological illustrations should.

The increasingly complex matter of copyright also limited the choice of illustrations, and it will be observed that they are drawn from only a few publications. In particular, it seemed inappropriate to use my own material, and in general I avoided doing so. The sources of the illustrations I have used are acknowledged in their captions, and I am grateful to all those individuals, publications and institutions that allowed me to reproduce their material. Particular thanks are due to the editors of *Antiquity*, *The Antiquaries Journal* and the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, from which the majority of the illustrations came. Specific acknowledgements are also due to Malcolm Thurlby, for permission to use his photograph reproduced in Figure 12, and to John Crook for permission to use his photograph reproduced in Figure 14. Although every effort has been made to obtain permission to reproduce copyright items, in some cases, because of the passage of time or other circumstances, this has not been possible. The author and publishers would be glad to hear from any

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copyright holders who have not been acknowledged. I would also like to thank Neal McCracken and Stuart Hay, photographers at the Australian National University, Canberra, for digital work on the illustrations, continuing the skilled assistance that they have given me for so many other publications. Similarly I am grateful to Douglas Elford, of the National Library of Australia, for technical assistance with Figure 8.

In addition, I wish to thank the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University, in Canberra, at which I have been a Visiting Fellow for some years. While writing this book I was also grateful for Kevin MacDonald's help, when he arranged my access to the library of the Institute of Archaeology at University College London.

Finally, I must once more thank Beryl Connah, my partner for almost five decades, for reading chapters, compiling the index and tolerating a husband who simply refuses to stop writing.