



Lives in Ruins: Archaeologists and the Seductive Lure of Human Rubble

Marilyn Johnson

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The author of *The Dead Beat* and *This Book is Overdue!* turns her piercing eye and charming wit to the real-life avatars of Indiana Jones—the archaeologists who sort through the muck and mire of swamps, ancient landfills, volcanic islands, and other dirty places to reclaim history for us all.

Pompeii, Machu Picchu, the Valley of the Kings, the Parthenon—the names of these legendary archaeological sites conjure up romance and mystery. The news is full of archaeology: treasures found (British king under parking lot) and treasures lost (looters, bulldozers, natural disaster, and war). Archaeological research tantalizes us with possibilities (are modern humans really part Neandertal?). Where are the archaeologists behind these stories? What kind of work do they actually do, and why does it matter?

Marilyn Johnson's *Lives in Ruins* is an absorbing and entertaining look at the lives of contemporary archaeologists as they sweat under the sun for clues to the puzzle of our past. Johnson digs and drinks alongside archaeologists, chases them through the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and even Machu Picchu, and excavates their lives. Her subjects share stories we rarely read in history books, about slaves and Ice Age hunters, ordinary soldiers of the American Revolution, children of the first century, Chinese woman warriors, sunken fleets, mummies.

What drives these archaeologists is not the money (meager) or the jobs (scarce) or the working conditions (dangerous), but their passion for the stories that would otherwise be buried and lost.

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Andrea Whitt:

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Candace Hernandez:

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