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JOURNALISTS AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS: NOTES ON DEALING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH THE MASS MEDIA

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Abstract: Over the past few decades the mass media have increasingly shaped public awareness. For many people, television, the radio, or the press are the only sources for archaeological topics and it is essential, therefore, to be able to collaborate with the world of journalism. It is not only sensational news stories that have an opportunity of being covered by the media, but also serious issues – provided that they are well told. Communicating scientific results to an audience outside one's own specialist subject is, however, not only a question of good will, but also of skill. This article focuses on how to get the attention of the mass media, how to exert influence on the quality of a newspaper article, radio or film, and how to communicate what is really important. It provides an overview of public and media relations and tries to give some helpful suggestions.

Keywords: interview, journalism, mass media, press release, public archaeology, science communication

INTRODUCTION

Almost every scientist has an anecdote about dealing with the media, usually rather demoralizing in its outcomes. Here is mine.

> In the summer of 1994, Holger Löwen, a palaeoanthropologist, and I excavated a Neolithic site in the heart of Germany. The site, belonging to the late Michelsberg Culture, looked like a mass of scattered stones and mud. We discovered arrowheads, bone tools, pottery, human bones covered in cut-marks, and the remains of stone structures. In view of the complex nature of the finds, and because nothing like it had ever previously been found, we had a job finding a suitable headline that would indicate how sensational it was, though the local heritage authority was happy to call it a 'ceremonial site'.
>
> One day a journalist from the science magazine *Sonde* ('Probe') came by to film a five-minute TV report about our work. Holger and I were rather worried that the journalist would be disappointed due to the lack of spectacular finds. He appeared to be satisfied, however; he filmed our excavation team at

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> work, and again a few weeks later while we were working on the finds. Eventually we were invited to the broadcasting station for the cutting of the film. The author and the technicians cut, in the truest sense of the word, all the material into pieces and put it back together again in a different order; a comment from me was added to another film sequence as a simple audio track. A scene at the excavation now gave the impression it had been filmed weeks later during the post-excavation phase. We really wanted to complain about the short accompanying commentary, because it seemed as if so much important information had been left out. But then we got a real surprise: the finished product seemed to express everything we had wanted to put across, in terms of the sensational nature of this seemingly unimportant find.

In this case, the end product turned out to be a good film about our work, and my colleague and I therefore had the opportunity of giving TV viewers a more detailed understanding of our project. We learned that journalists use completely different methods and rules of communication to archaeologists without necessarily falsifying the results.[1] Although we were fortunate in our experience, others have not been so lucky.

Co-operating with the mass media is not a secret science, but there is no magic formula for it either. Those who suggest, for example, that television is the best way of selling science are not completely wrong, but neither are they always right. The advice that scientists should never answer questions that go beyond their professional and specialist knowledge in an interview could be right in one situation and wrong in another. There is also no such thing as 'the media', just as there are no such things as 'scientists' or 'the public'. Each of these groups is extremely heterogeneous (the words are used here in a general sense, as a working concept). A scientist can co-operate with serious newspapers or with glossy TV magazines. There are in-depth radio programmes and there are quick news bulletins. There are trustworthy journalists, but there are also those that will do anything to sell their papers. Archaeologists may be surrounded by reporters if they make the find of the century, but they often have to be thankful just to get a mention in the media.

Learning how to deal with the mass media to suit the scientist and his or her work is not rocket science. The rules journalists adhere to are easy to comprehend, and in this article I look at some of them. I describe why scientists and journalists have to work differently and what tools are needed for a successful media appearance. Working with the newspapers, radio and television should be seen as an opportunity and not a hazard. One cannot change the media, but one does not need to be completely at their mercy either. This article will focus on how to get the attention of the mass media, how to exert influence on the quality of a newspaper article, radio or film, and how to communicate what is really important.

WHY COMMUNICATE ARCHAEOLOGY?

Scientists who work with journalists are sometimes the target of unkind comment from their colleagues, especially in subjects where there has been very little experience

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of dealing with the media. Media popularity is often viewed with suspicion, and some researchers are keen to point out the 'errors' of the journalists or laugh at the simplifications which scientists had to adopt. Of course, these are the colleagues who have never been asked to do an interview or those whose media appearances have gone horribly wrong.

Why should an archaeologist want to communicate the results of his or her research to the general public? For some researchers money is the most important reason. Sponsors and politicians are more aware of someone with a reputation outside narrow scientific circles. Otherwise, non-professionals find the world of science extremely obscure and difficult to comprehend. The awarding of sponsorship money, at the European level, for example, increasingly depends, among other things, on whether a scientist is prepared to give the general public an understanding of his work. Museums and research centres have to bring their work to the public's notice; they need the public in order to exist. Archaeological sites are difficult to protect and maintain without public interest.

The past belongs to everyone and not just a small group of archaeologists. At the European Association of Archaeologists' Annual Meeting in Cork in 2005, George S. Smith (USA) stated:

> Like it or not, all archaeologists are public archaeologists, and as such they must inform and captivate, inspire and illuminate, excite and challenge, and most of all they must tell our collective story in a way that helps others to touch the past. It is not just a job, it is an ethical responsibility. (Smith 2005)

Through involvement with the mass media, one reaches a completely different audience than was previously possible. Good communication with people outside one's specialist subject can broaden one's own perspective: things that seemed certainties are viewed differently; surprising questions appear. At first, the physicist Harald Lesch discussed physics and astronomy in the pub. Now, apart from teaching at Munich University, he has his own TV astronomy show and radio broadcasts. Lesch recommends communicating with the general public to all scientists:

> What you get back is just so much more than what you invest. When teenagers come to you and you tell them something about the physics of science fiction films, I can get them to listen for much longer. The fascination in their faces – that's the fascination that goes with our profession. If you've done that once, you know that there is so much more to life than just writing a research publication, which can only be understood by seven other people in the world. (Lorenzen 2005:19)

Over the past few decades the mass media have increasingly shaped public awareness. For many people the media are the only sources for topics from the field of science. And they want to find out more: The Eurobarometer Survey compiled in January 2005 shows that people want more information from scientists about their work (RTD info 2005).

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One reason, however, why some archaeologists approach the media is based on a mistaken assumption: increased media attention does not necessarily increase public interest in the subject and does not automatically create increased acceptance of the subject. Increased knowledge means that the audience is actually more critical (Kohring 2005:218; Nowotny 2004b; Weingart 2004:18). This should not discourage anyone, however; numerous surveys of the general public, including the Eurobarometer Survey, show that science is as well-respected as ever (Weingart 2001:247ff). Increased media presence gives archaeology more public attention, which includes a great deal of approval, but also criticism. Finally, the myths of the subject can give way to a more realistic public evaluation.

SCIENCE – PUBLIC – MASS MEDIA: A RÉSUMÉ

Archaeologists have differing perceptions of the tasks involved in journalism. Some say journalists should draw attention to archaeology. Others want to educate and teach the general public through the media. There are some who dismiss journalists and believe them all to be responsible for spreading superficialities. And then there are other archaeologists who know how to make use of the opportunities of the mass media and who see them as a means of promoting their own public visibility.

But what is the real task of journalism, dealing as it does with the contradictory context of science and the general public? Let us begin with an extremely outdated, yet still widespread conception.

The traditional popularization concept

Supporters of this approach, which emerged in the middle of the 1970s, were convinced that scientific knowledge was 'true' and fundamentally superior, and that popular knowledge was on a lower order (Weingart 2005:169). In accordance with this concept, the layperson waited to be taught and to gain knowledge as if he/she were a blank piece of paper. Science communication was *de facto* the education of an amorphous, passive general public through science.

Following this line, there were numerous surveys on public scientific literacy. Typically, it emerged that a high percentage of those surveyed did not know at what temperature water boiled, and whether the earth moved around the sun or *vice versa*. Many researchers regarded these people's ignorance as a 'deficit' or deficiency (hence this concept is also known as the deficit model) and as the main problem bearing on the lack of public recognition for their professional activity. So the tests often concluded with a demand that more should be done to increase the general level of education (Lévy-Leblond 1992) and to thus promote the 'public understanding of science'.

The scientist saw the media as facilitators, as 'translators',[2] and as propagandists whose job it was to put across the results of researchers to the general public. Journalism was expected to be the instrument of science – in which it was the scientist who evaluated whether the transfer of knowledge was correct and appropriate.

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For science, every popularization was therefore at best a simplification and at worst a falsification of its results, according to Weingart (2005:169).[3] All the blame for the lack of public acceptance lay in the indifferent audience and incompetent media.

Much time and money went into the 'enlightenment' of the public. In reality, however, all the advertising campaigns to broaden scientific understanding and larger public acceptance have not come up with the desired result (Nowotny 2004a:222).[4]

On the way to a real dialogue

In dealing with the mass media and the public, this traditional science-based popularization concept can no longer be sustained, as has been clear since the middle of the 1990s. Better forms of external communication and knowledge transfer are required. At the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 1999, Sir Robert May (at the time Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK government, and head of its Office of Science and Technology) argued that it was not progress in scientific areas that was the most significant task of science in the twenty-first century, but dialogue with the public: 'We should no longer just pass on wisdom' (quoted from Schnabel 1999). The public's belief in the authority of scientific expertise would be long gone.[5] May demanded a dialogue between science and the public instead of the previous scientific monologue: 'We have to provide politics with better information; involve the audience more and learn better how to deal with the trust shown by the public' (quoted from Schnabel 1999).

The position of the public

There is no one, homogenous, 'public' eager to learn, and hoping for more information. It is made up of countless groups based on similarities in profession, social status, degree of education, religious denomination, age, hobbies and so on. Some people in these groups will be interested in archaeology, but for various reasons and with different objectives.[6] There are probably even one or two archaeologists among them: when these archaeologists do not know about the topic a specialist is trying to communicate, they also become one of the 'broad public', too. The only thing that connects these different people to each other is that they are *not* experts in an extremely restricted specialist area.

Lumping them all together, as happened in the past, means that one will only be able to inspire a few people. If one wants to reach a specific audience, one has to work on them beforehand and get to know their interests and needs. While scientists build their academic knowledge on material studies, natural laws, statistics and rational rules, the views of non-professionals are based mainly on personal experience, presumptions, values, misgivings or beliefs.[7] If researchers recognize the differing views of their non-specialist counterparts and speak to non-experts 'on equal terms', the scientific view of things offers just one of many possibilities. At the same time, however, this should not open the floodgates to extreme relativism.

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The position of journalism

Researchers in science journalism nowadays see the media as being far more than just a mere means of communication. The selection criteria according to which journalists evaluate and prepare information are fundamentally different to those used in science; things that are important to a researcher do not necessarily have to be equally important to a journalist, and what is just tiny detail to a scientist could generate full-blown media coverage. So the media do not represent science one to one and do not see this as their task.

Peter Weingart phrases the consequences of this as follows:

> [The media] constructs its own reality in the same way as science does. It just uses a different way to access the 'reality' it is looking to cover and other methods of presenting it. The most common grievance voiced by science about 'wrong' or 'warped' reports or about the alleged 'incorrect' selection of news consequently completely misses the point. (Weingart 2001:238)

Conflicts will therefore emerge between science and the media when they are asked which presentation of reality is superior:

> Science is losing its monopoly over this assessment competence to the same degree that the media are becoming increasingly important and the autonomy of its ways of working and its impact are being experienced. The abstract criterion of 'truth' in science is no longer exclusively valid, but confronted with the criterion of public agreement by the media. The reliability of a piece of information ... stands vis-à-vis its degree of distribution ... (Weingart 2001:239)

A significant prerequisite for journalistic quality is the autonomy of science journalism (Göpfert 2005:38; Kohring 2005:277; Lublinski 2004:26ff.).[8] If the journalist is too close to the object of his/her coverage then a neutral, objective viewpoint is no longer possible. For this reason editors are increasingly resistant when a scientist, who has been interviewed for an article, wants to have editorial control over the article.[9] Editorial self-determination and content-related distance have long been on the agenda of other sectors of journalism: it is not the person whose work is portrayed who evaluates the journalistic coverage, but the audience. Scientists therefore have to get used to criticism and accept that it is part of the rules of journalism that apply to a journalistic product.

In 1990, the then 87-year-old publicist and futurologist Robert Jungk stated: '[Science journalism] should not provide "neutral" coverage as is usually expected, but judge and evaluate matters. If journalism discusses art, literature or theatre, it is expected that the authors produce a well-founded, critical statement regarding the displayed cultural product.' This should be no different in research: 'Internal criticism by colleagues is in fact deemed as a matter of course, whereas interference "from the outside" is seen as unprofessional, annoying and aggravating' (Jungk 1990:42). But journalism is more than just covering laboratory successes. The BBC science journalist Pallab Ghosh said:

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> The media isn't there to enthuse, it is there to challenge and question what is going on in the scientific community. My job is not so much to explain in an artful manner, but to reflect the debate that's going on both within the scientific community and in the wider society. That's the difference between journalism and propaganda. (Quoted from Owens 2002:711)

In reality, however, the media do spend too little time dealing critically with research topics. Instead it is usually colourful and entertaining: there has been a huge increase in journalism oriented to users' everyday needs, which provides a service, advice and entertainment and therefore draws upon scientists as its sources. 'Sciencetainment' and 'archaeotainment' are booming, and topics from the fields of science, medicine and technology make for good circulation and viewing figures.

The fact that current (in contrast to earlier) coverage meets the needs and requests of media users is surely a major reason for the present enthusiasm about science in the mass media. There is, however, criticism of this colourful science especially from journalists themselves. A child-like perspective on the magic world of science does not take into account the fact that research can be complex and contradictory, that the results are the culmination of hard work and that critical examination of the science system still remains appropriate (Göpfert 2005; Wormer 2005).

The position of science

The needs and trends of the mass media have an effect on science. Weingart (2005:28ff.) speaks of its 'medialization': universities and research facilities often have advertising strategies which are no less professional than those of PR agencies (sometimes they are actually designed by PR agencies). They send customized material (texts, pictures, film footage) to editorial offices, which then can be used by journalists. This mainly applies to politically and economically relevant areas such as, for example, pharmacy or nanotechnology. The boundaries between solid scientific information and pure advertising are becoming increasingly blurred in the 'race' for a desired positive image among the general public and editorial offices. Sometimes a good 'salesman' is more likely to be featured than a good scientist. But if researchers have to sell themselves well, they sometimes have no time left for research. It is necessary to find a balance so as not to get caught up in the search for the best image.

The humanities usually follow this development from a distance, if they are affected by it at all. In part, they still view the mass media and general public in accordance with the traditional popularization concept.[10] They have only been in the focus of public attention at certain moments – at least in Germany – and have moved to the sidelines of the public arena. Feeling that they are less in the limelight than the natural sciences, the humanities have put much less effort into communicating with others. Although they may be able to say a great deal about what we can learn from the past, they hold back instead of setting out to emphasize their importance (Sentker 2005a). The German politician Fritz Kuhn finds the humanities 'unbearably modest' in his country:

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> When I talk to a biochemist who wants money, he says he's got something to prevent cancer. In the humanities you never see anyone who says 'I can explain the world to you' or 'I can structure moral problems and reveal inconsistencies' ... Such scholars would always hide behind their specialist subjects, and would assert no claim whatsoever to playing an important role in social discourse. (Quoted from Sentker 2005b)

And yet, archaeology could offer something unique:

> Archaeology must prepare practitioners, students, governments, and the public for the challenge and responsibility of being the only profession that looks systematically at the human condition through time and in all places. What archaeology has to offer is not only the enjoyment of the past but also the information and insight into successful and unsuccessful attempts to change the human condition. (Smith et al. 2004:325)

One of the challenges facing archaeology is dealing with the complexity of different segments of the public, including the mass media. Many possibilities are open to those who have the necessary tools to facilitate the communication of knowledge. It is not only sensational news stories that have an opportunity of being covered by the media, but also serious issues – provided that they are well told.

SCIENTISTS AND JOURNALISTS: DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Much of what goes wrong between scientists and journalists is based on misunderstandings and mutual ignorance of working conditions. Some similarities apart, there are major differences in the method of operation and objectives of the two professions.

Scientists and journalists act on ideas, on open questions; both are curious and critical. They research, collect and check data in order to publish them in what is for them the most important place. Solid source material, high news value and significance for the reader are the standards of quality by which both work. And the journalist, at least a good journalist, tries to report objectively and to find supporting documentation for each aspect of a story he or she investigates.[11]

But they come from different professional worlds: while the scientist has been researching something for years, a journalist sometimes only has a few days or even hours to do an article. A specialist on the LBK culture probably knows little about the Etruscans. The journalist, on the other hand, will not normally be highly specialized, as he or she must be able to operate in many different situations. The results and the methodology are the most significant factors for the researcher. For the journalist it is the relevance to the everyday life of his/her audience that is most important. Scientists are wary of describing a result as absolutely definite. Journalists cannot communicate the degree of uncertainty precisely, because they have to get a point across. Furthermore, scientists and journalists live in different language cultures: those who are part of a scientific community use jargon. Journalists have to work in

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such a way that their audience will enjoy reading about the topic. A basic condition for this is that the language must be understandable to all.

In scientific texts it is the topic and not the author that is important. Journalists, on the other hand, are often interested in the person they are reporting about. It is a matter of interest what the archaeologist felt when he/she made his/her discovery, or whether the doctor lives as healthily as he/she recommends. The women and the men behind the research, their doubts, and the reasons for their dedication to science, become visible and are sometimes actually the most important element of a story.[12]

A scientist may sometimes feel uncomfortable with that. Furthermore, at times things are presented so as to appear stereotypical, emotional and exaggerated: the archaeologist turns into the detective, the adventurer who solves centuries-old puzzles, or even becomes a treasure-hunter. A grave, a Hallstatt pot and even a medieval kiln are, however, more than just mere objects and finds; they fascinate and touch people. Archaeology intertwines highly emotional aspects with the mysteries of the past and its archaeological discoveries – Cornelius Holtorf speaks of the 'Archaeo-Appeal' (Holtorf 2005:150ff.). The discipline robs itself of many opportunities when it tries to limit things to a purely factual level.

There can be no doubt that scientists and journalists have different objectives. The researcher, for example, wants to point out the importance of his or her work and hopes to secure additional funding. The journalist wants to write an interesting story or air a grievance. The idea that both are in the same boat is therefore wrong. But they depend on each other. If they respect each other's tasks and methods of operation then good co-operation is very possible (Peters and Göpfert 1995).

'External' communication

Communicating scientific results to an audience outside one's own specialist subject is not only a question of good will, but also of skill. This has to be learned and tried out; it is not enough simply to make a commitment. It is anything but easy to summarize years of research work in a few easily understandable sentences, or to omit completely something that took years to solve. It is one thing to give a lecture or to write a professional article, but a completely different ball game to adapt to the rules of the mass media.

Complex science cannot be explained easily, but that is not necessarily the point. Michael Zick, a science journalist who has been writing about archaeology for more than 20 years, formulates it as follows:

> When I write an article, the individual excavation is not as interesting to me as its overall context, e.g. to which historical period is this royal kurgan linked? How should I classify it chronologically and culturally? What came before? What came after? What can you infer from this? The main thing is to display trends and to find links. The kurgan itself is interesting to me as a story angle, but I can't just write an article on that by itself ... I have to talk of the Scythians and the other horse-riding peoples who were constantly pushing westwards from Western Siberia. So I have to incorporate it in a larger story.[13]

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The majority of the audience has no wish to be informed of details, but looks for overviews and orientation in a complex world. People want to acquire knowledge that is important to them. I believe that it is better if a reader has understood the basic idea of a piece of work and is fascinated by it than to have learnt the distinguishing features of La Tène C and D. In any case, it is probably harder for a journalist to explain the government's new tax model or pension reform than to report on the discovery of a Celtic *oppidum*.

What are the media interested in?

Journalists and editors have different interests and agendas. The views presented here can therefore only represent a small excerpt from what the media appreciate about archaeology.

Udo Zindel, an editor and author for a German daily radio programme with features on education and science, characterizes archaeology as an extremely descriptive science. When he selects an archaeological topic, there are some criteria he always likes to meet:

> It's not about gold and sensation-seeking. A story needs detail and has to be exciting. 'Exciting' doesn't mean the same as 'sensational'. It is always exciting when archaeological finds provide an insight into everyday life in the past, such as: What did the people eat? How did they protect themselves against the cold? What did ancient people look like? It is also important to establish a link with today's world. This could also manifest itself by showing that things today are completely different from ancient times.[14]

Uwe Gradwohl, the project manager of the daily TV show *Planet Wissen* (*Planet Knowledge*), has presented numerous archaeological topics, including several programmes on the Celts. To him it is important to select topics associated with the history of the area in which the viewers live:

> For us the criteria are a certain link to real life and a broad range of topics. 'A link to real life' means that the topic should have something to do with our own lives on an emotional level. The Celts have got something to do with us. We can suggest to the public: 'You potentially originate from the Celts. That's why this topic could be interesting for you to watch.'[15]

The regional aspect, too, is often important in archaeology. The local media are interested when an excavation or exhibition takes place in or around the place where their public lives, or when a scientist who is being interviewed teaches in the audience's area. The media are interested in whatever their audience finds interesting. So if one can connect archaeological research to the life of this audience, then the chances of a journalist reporting on the research are much greater.

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DEALING WITH THE MASS MEDIA

Those who want to be closer to media circles must ask themselves two important questions: How do I get the attention of the media? And what should I do when I've got it?[16]

Whether one likes it or not, getting the attention of the media involves a high degree of competition: in editorial departments grave mounds compete with embryonic stem cells, and a Roman villa competes with new models of climate change. If the journalist doesn't understand what researcher A is trying to tell him/her, but sees that researcher B has something important to say, then he/she will select B. It is important to realize that scientists have to work hard so that journalists can have it easier. But there is still plenty for the journalist to do after receiving the information. Experience shows that supporting the journalist in his/her work assures the quality of the presentation of the topic, and therefore serves the interests of archaeology: 'Bad science journalism is inevitably produced when journalists need a scientist's help and, for whatever reason, don't get it' (Shortland and Gregory 1991:146).

Journalists do not come across interesting topics after months of research in the library or laboratory. Small editorial offices that are constantly under pressure to produce articles are the rule. For this to work at all, the media require a system that selects topics and prepares them in such a way that an author can quickly write an article. This is what news agencies do.[17] Agency material often makes up a high percentage of what appears in the science pages of the newspapers, because subscribers to such a service are allowed to use the texts unaltered, shortened or even amended through their own research.

Further sources of information are press releases, which either land directly on the editor's desk or indirectly via science information services such as AlphaGalileo, the German information service Informationsdienst Wissenschaft, or EurekAlert in the USA.[18] Editors have other sources, of course, including international professional journals, personal contacts with scientists and even knowledge of what the competition is doing. In addition, journalists will already have established good relations with university press offices.[19]

It is important to consider how one can best communicate research. Is it suitable for a visually-oriented medium, because it can be communicated well through pictures? Is the work one wants to communicate limited in visual appeal or would it be very difficult to put across visually? If that is the case then maybe radio or print media would be better suited. Are the national media the right place or would one be better off going for the local newspapers?[20] Could one interest the health magazines in discoveries on medieval diet? In this way it is possible to narrow down the circle of those who might be interested in one's work and so save a lot of work and disappointment.

Not everything that seems important to scientists is news, nor does it inspire journalists. The wastepaper-baskets of editors are full of press releases about museum budgets, inaugural lectures or visitor figures. It is important to concentrate time and energy on topics that can be told in a colourful and exciting way.[21]

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Press releases

A press release is a text covering around one A4 page, containing everything that journalists might find important. Since it is journalists who are to make use of this material, it must be prepared according to journalistic criteria. The editor is the first reader. He or she has to find the story interesting, important or amusing, and to get the impression that the informant can tell a good story. It is important not to pack too much technical detail into the text.

The layout of a press release is based on that of a short message: the title is short, it contains the key words and says what it is about: 'Stonehenge road rethink threatens recovery of rarest bird' (RSPB 2006). The most important, useful or innovative features for the reader are found at the beginning of the text without any introduction: 'Plans to build a road tunnel to ease congestion near Stonehenge could soon be scrapped, threatening the government-backed recovery of one of Britain's rarest birds' (RSPB 2006). Then conclusions and results are ranked in the order of decreasing importance. The background of the story comes at the end. The layout of a press release is effectively the opposite to that of a professional article.

The five so-called 'W questions' have to be answered in the text: Who has researched/said something? What is new? Where did the research take place? When did this happen? Why is it important?

It is important to highlight what is new in a press release. 'New' can have a completely different meaning to editors and scientists: the publication of research findings in a professional journal has news value, even if it has long been discussed in specialist circles. On the other hand it is no longer 'new' for journalists when a release about an excavation comes two weeks after it has finished. So one must tell the recipient of the press release exactly why he/she is getting it at this particular moment: 'Two over-ground alternatives to the tunnel – set to be detailed in consultation documents due today – would destroy nesting and roosting sites of the secretive stone curlew' (RSPB 2006).

The language of professional journals, or specialist jargon and literary exercises in style, must be avoided. One should indicate if there are photos, and if more information about the project can be found on a website. A contact address is important in a press release, because editors usually have further questions. The contact should be available for at least one week after publication of the press release (Scherzler 2008:29). Calling the editorial offices and asking whether a press release has arrived should be avoided.[22]

Print and online media rely on good pictures. Pictures can even be the deciding factor as to whether a topic is covered or not. Of course, it is not a close-up of some excavation detail that journalists are after – readers are usually more interested in seeing pictures of people excavating an artefact, or in an aerial photo taken in good natural light. Photos, which should be in digital format wherever possible, should be provided with a sentence or two that could be used as a caption, along with any copyright information. Figures 1–4 provide examples of different kinds of illustration that might be appropriate in different situations.

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Figure 1. *Human skeletal remains from the LBK site at Herxheim. This picture is intelligible to the general public because a skull is visible. If it were not, most journalists and their audiences would need an explanatory text or an indication of what the picture shows. Source: Speyer Regional Heritage Authority.*

Figure 2. *Archaeological excavations near Esperstedt, between Erfurt and Magdeburg. Excavation director (front right) and his team uncovering a Neolithic pot. A plaster 'jacket' is used to protect it. Because of its subject matter, this would represent an attractive picture to provide to the press. Source: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie mit Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle.*

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Figure 3. *This picture is excellently suited for the press, while the information content is only marginal from a scientific point of view. The caption might be: 'Archaeologists excavate on the site of the future A38 Autobahn. They have to work in all weathers if they want to save the site because of the extremely tight schedule set for the construction of the motorway.' Source: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie mit Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle.*

Figure 4. *Reconstruction drawings contribute greatly to making history come alive and to giving an impression of everyday life in past times. Source: Christina von Elm, Die Zeichnerei, Tübingen, Germany.*

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Interviews

In an interview it is important to think what message one wants to convey and what is most important, so one does not simply react to questions, but also takes an active part in shaping one's media appearance. One should ask the journalist what is the target audience he or she is writing for, and what previous knowledge one can assume.

One should respect the deadlines of journalists and the limited time they have to deal with a topic. An archaeologist may spend months working on a professional article, but a journalist only has hours until his/her article has to be sent off. In the words of science journalist Markus Bohn: 'When a journalist has to write a two-column layout in a local newspaper, you can't expect him to take two days to discuss it with the scientist and have everything explained to him.'[23] Often very simple questions will be put; one should remember that the main aim of journalists is to be understood by their audience, and they have a limited amount of airtime or number of lines to achieve their objective.

Some scientists think that they can score points by showcasing their excellent knowledge in front of the microphone. And it is, of course, essential to have top specialist knowledge, but scientists actually impress most by being brief and to the point, and by expressing themselves clearly so that they are understood by everyone. It is better to get to the point and to summarize the state of knowledge than to have the journalist to do it.

It is important to use pictures and comparisons. A good example from a different discipline might be this: 'A proton is the last building block of an atom ... Protons are so small that there would be enough space for approximately 500,000,000,000 of them on a small spot of ink like, for example, the dot on this i – that is more than all the seconds in half a million years' (Bryson 2004:21). Statistics can be turned into figures that can be comprehended ('If we take this town as an example, 30 people would suffer from this illness').

In articles on archaeological discoveries, really colourful pictures are occasionally evoked. Sometimes they are no real problem, but simply different to the language culture of the subject and therefore irritating for scientists. Alternative interpretations and hypotheses may, however, bypass the presumed reality of the ancient culture. It is important to prevent these if at all possible. The cut-marks on the human skulls of Herxheim in Rheinland-Westphalia could prompt the question as to whether there was prehistoric cannibalism. Some journalists associated the palaeolithic stone phallus found in the Hohle Fels cave with a sex toy. But by sticking strictly to the facts during an interview or press release, a journalist will have to interpret things him/herself and he/she will probably do a worse job than the archaeologist could have done. So one should make clear what is regarded as secure, what is just a hypothesis, and what is unlikely. For preference it is the archaeologist who should talk about cannibalism, sex toys and the rest, as it is always better to discuss a point than to leave room for unfounded speculation. But one should not give any answers that one does not actually want to give.[24]

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Reducing mistakes

The main complaint made by scientists about the work of journalists is that there are mistakes and inaccuracies in TV programmes, radio or the print media. Surveys carried out on so-called 'accuracy research' seem to concede this point as well. Scientists do, however, often measure media coverage according to scientific and not journalistic criteria. Journalists have other criteria for the selection of information than scientists do; many criteria can therefore not be transferred wholesale (Kohring 2005:169ff.).[25]

Scientists can regard various things as erroneous: omissions; simplifications; and factual errors. Omissions are always necessary in journalism, because space or airtime is restricted. The journalist has to develop a major thread for a topic and address the aspects that would be interesting for his/her audience. Omitting details is a fine art and can result in bringing out the real essence of a story. Simplifications are also inevitable so that the audience can follow the topic.

Errors are, of course, annoying.[26] The quality of an article, however, depends not only on the skills of the journalist, but also on the source. One can therefore exert a great deal of influence on the degree of error in a newspaper article, film or radio programme. One should do everything in one's power to ensure that the journalist understands what one is trying to communicate, and that he/she has received all the information required for a good article.[27] One must therefore do away with academic styles of writing, and leave out or explain foreign words.[28] Sometimes seemingly ordinary, everyday words have a special meaning in archaeology. The *Deutsche Presseagentur*, for example, published the following sentence: 'According to archaeologists, Neolithic regional groups can be differentiated by their forms of decoration.' Non-archaeologists understand a 'group' to be a collection of people and might conclude that the people were once decorated, for example with tattoos, and that every tribe had a characteristic pattern. The archaeologists were in fact referring to a five-phase development of LBK pottery in the Palatinate region of Germany.

The most important piece of advice is: the more concise and clear the explanation, the less will have to be cut out and the more from the interview can be broadcast or printed. The better one expresses oneself, the less the journalist will have to shorten or rephrase things.

The next steps

There are scientists who demand to be sent a manuscript, screenplay or film before it is broadcast or printed.[29] They think that way they can control the journalistic product and assure its quality. Editors like Uwe Gradwohl strongly advise against this approach: 'It would be preposterous if a guest wanted to do an editorial check. We couldn't live with that at all. And it would result in us not doing the programme, at least not with this guest. We are independent in what we broadcast. We don't have to get approval from anywhere.'[30]

Members of the media are autonomous observers – that is what 'freedom of the press' means. That is why journalists and editors tend passionately to resist

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patronizing and interfering behaviour.[31] They would do the same if a business boss wanted to proof-read the stock market report before it went out, or if a politician demanded that a leading article on his/her election campaign be presented to him/her prior to publication. Good journalists are ultimately committed to the public and not to scientists.

Udo Zindel believes that a close climate of communication between the scientist and the journalist is more important than a fight over every last word: 'As a scientist I would use more energy selecting forms of media that are suitable for me instead of trying to control everything.'[32]

It is, however, completely admissible to offer to read through a text for factual correctness. If the journalist accepts the offer, it is important to stick to the facts only. If, for example, the general public want to have their say about the length of time an archaeologist is spending digging up their streets, it is not up to the archaeologist to try to stop this when checking a text.

The media often give several reports about a topic: if, for example, an archaeologist gave an opinion about a site which featured in a newspaper article some months ago, the editor may request a further article so readers can find out what has happened since. One should therefore make use of the contacts established with journalists over the years. Markus Bohn advises the following:

> If a scientist has already been in contact with a journalist once, then he should maintain this contact. This way he can create continuity, even if articles are actually only published every six or nine months. A journalist does not, of course, want to be called up every day, but a scientist can send an e-mail or give him a call every couple of months or when he's got something new.[33]

One is not restricted to discussing only one's own research. The Year of the Neanderthal Man 2006, the looting of the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad, or the designation of the Roman Limes as a World Heritage Site are current topics for expressing one's views to the media, and indeed excellent opportunities for making archaeological views known. Archaeologists who are solely focused on their everyday research tend to miss out on a lot (Scherzler 2005:158). Topics such as the illegal trade in antiquities are among those where it is important that an archaeological voice should be heard, and where those with suitable expertise should seek out journalists.

IN CONCLUSION ...

This article cannot provide more than an overview of dealing with the media. It does not replace media training, in which one can actively practise writing for the mass media and conducting interviews, but I hope it has provided some helpful suggestions. There is no magic formula for dealing with journalists, but there are a lot of successful tools. Perhaps readers will not be able, or want, to implement everything, but at least they will know what to do next time when a journalist rings up and says 'I have a question I would like to put to you …'..

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NOTES

1. I did not know at the time that I would end up working for the same TV station that made this film. The views and arguments on science and the media in this article are my own and not necessarily those of my employer, Südwestrundfunk.

2. Peter Weingart (2001:235) points out that the image of the 'translator' reduces the facilitation of scientific contents by journalists to a linguistic problem. Even today there are scientists who believe that a journalist only simplifies what is said on a linguistic level in order to make it comprehensible for his audience.

3. Nick Merriman (2004:5ff.) emphasizes the merits of the deficit model in view of, for example, maintaining sites. There is, however, a weakness in the fact that it prevents contestation and debate – which are intrinsically linked with the interpretation of the past. In my evaluation of the various models, I refer exclusively to dealings with the mass media.

4. As Matthias Kohring (2005:172), an expert in communication theory, states: 'The traditional "deficit model" of scientific literacy ... is seen as completely unsuitable for grasping the social context in which the production and the usage of scientific knowledge are embedded.'

5. Helga Nowotny (2005:5), Vice-President of the Scientific Council of the European Research Council, also points to the changed acceptance of science by society: 'Science can no longer expect unconditional support on the part of society for whatever it wants to do, nor unconditional acceptance of its authority.'

With regard to archaeology, Roger M. Thomas (2004:191) says: 'Today, people are less ready to accept the "authorized" view of the archaeological past, preferring to choose for themselves what kind of past they wish to believe in. This has implications for the role of the state archaeological official, who may have to change from being a figure of unquestioned authority to playing a role of facilitator in other people's exploration of the past.'

Matthias Kohring (2005:216) emphasizes that this change in the relationship between science and society should not be regarded as a crisis, but rather more as an initial state of normalization in which authority is also being challenged.

6. A politician would, for example, like to find out whether a project is eligible for sponsorship. People from neighbouring towns are interested in the history of their hometown. The reporter is looking for an exciting piece of news. Parents want to give their children an exciting afternoon out by taking them to an excavation.

7. As an example, this is how one reader comments on the book 'The Bible unearthed: Archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts' by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman: 'The authors may be excellent archaeologists, but they didn't understand much about the content of the book [i.e. the Bible], which they want to tackle with excavations. It is about the history of people who have developed a relationship with God ... It doesn't make any difference if I know that archaeological findings speak in favour of the fact that the Pentateuch was not written in about 900–800 BC, but about 200 years later. [The Bible] is a book that tells of the love of special and unique people of God. If I take it seriously and see it as a witness of this love I can understand it better. If I just look

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between broken pottery and ruined walls I won't find anything' (amazon.de, review by 'jfhofmann2' dated 26 November 2005. Accessed 19 June 2008).

8. Science journalism is journalism that observes science and humanities and uses them as sources of information. It is not journalism that is scientific or carried out by scientists.

9. By, for example, demanding to read a newspaper article before it goes to print or by being shown the finished film and having the right to enforce changes.

10. With archaeologists, the degree of professionalism in dealing with the media differs markedly from country to country and is, for example, higher in Britain or the US than in Germany and Austria.

11. It is not possible to report completely objectively, because even the selection of what is relevant is subjective. An interpretation is therefore always included, but not always an evaluation (Häusermann 2005:24ff.). It is extremely difficult for the journalist to investigate the accuracy of scientific findings. He has to use journalistic methods of testing like, for example, counter research, i.e. verification of the facts with the help of a second expert.

12. In a film for the British science programme *Horizon* Andrew Wiles (the mathematician who solved Fermat's Last Theorem in June 1993) was interviewed. In the interview, Wiles broke down in tears as he tried to explain the implications of his discovery. The man and his struggle to find a solution to a highly complex problem is the crux of the film and touches the viewers. A film on Fermat's Theorem, stating that apart from zero there are no integers a, b, c for the equation $a^n+b^n=c^n$ if n is an integer greater than 2, would have moved fewer people to want to find out more about the significance of this mathematical breakthrough (Filkin 2002:19). The journalist saw Wiles's emotion as being part of his work as a researcher and as being equally as important as the scientific result.

13. Interview with Michael Zick (Stuttgart, 30 December 2005).

14. Interview with Udo Zindel (Stuttgart, 9 August 2005).

15. Interview with Uwe Gradwohl (Baden-Baden, 29 July 2005).

16. An anonymous referee, clearly well versed in these matters, suggests that mutual trust between archaeologists and journalists can be developed in two ways: for the archaeologist, by imposing, and having respected, an embargo on the timing of publication; and for the journalist, on having exclusive access to a story. I have not touched on embargoes in this article as I see it as a more complicated matter than this, not designed to develop mutual trust.

17. The Associated Press, Deutsche Presseagentur, Reuters, Agence France Presse or United Press International are some of the biggest agencies.

18. See http://www.alphagalileo.org/; http://www.idw-online.de/; http://www.urekalert.org/(all accessed July 2008).

19. I thank an anonymous referee for the observation that specialist journalists much prefer to be approached directly, and to be able to talk directly to the archaeologist(s) concerned.

20. Norbert Schulz-Bruhdoel (2001:68ff.) points out that the significance of nationally circulated newspapers is – at least in Germany – often exaggerated as they only reach about 6% of the population. Schulz-Bruhdoel recommends that one should not take them more seriously than other newspapers when dealing with the media. Small newspapers would actually be more strongly embedded in their area of circulation and therefore very influential. In Germany they reach over 70% of the population.

21. White et al. (1993:8) write of the 'So what?' test every story has to pass for having a chance to be covered by the media: 'Who does the story affect? ... Will anyone be interested or moved or outraged by the story? Does it say something about our society or the way we live our lives now? Is it wacky enough, different enough, to make people smile or discuss it in the pub, even if it isn't of earth-shattering importance? So what?'

22. It is important to have personal contact with the editorial offices, but some journalists receive several dozen press releases every day. Within seconds they know if a topic interests them. A phone call does not usually change the decision of the journalist, but he or she could possibly perceive it as a nuisance.

23. Interview with Markus Bohn (Baden-Baden, 10 August 2005).

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24. Nick Merriman (2004:7) advises archaeologists to go with and not against, interpretations made by the non-professional public:

> No matter how hard archaeologists try, non-archaeologists will re-appropriate, re-interpret and re-negotiate meanings of archaeological resources to their own personal agendas. It is better, surely, to work actively with this realization when considering the relationship between archaeology and the non-professional public, rather than try to force people to follow a single agenda.

25. On the other hand it would be pointless to judge a professional publication according to journalistic criteria. In that case it would be bad if it contained footnotes and a literature list!

26. What is meant is an article stating, for instance, that Troy had three settlement layers instead of nine or ten. Of course, errors can occur because of omission and simplification.

27. White et al. (1993:101) write: 'Inaccuracies are most likely to creep in because a complicated matter has not been explained sufficiently clearly'.

28. Norbert Schulz-Bruhdoel (2001:277) recommends a really simple test for all those who definitely do not want to do without specialist terms and believe they are generally understandable: write down the terms in question 'on some cards and make sure they are easily legible, then go to a supermarket and ask the staff and customers to explain these words.'

29. Journalists call this a verbal check. In journalism this is carried out by a second person, for example, by an editor or the final editor. Their objections can result in extensive alterations or even to the article being dropped for transmission or publication. This principle should serve to assure the quality of the product. If the scientist claims the right to this verbal check then he tries to take over the function of one of the author's superiors.

The verbal check is different from the peer review, because of the much higher speed at which it takes place (it can sometimes take place within a few minutes) and due to the fact that the editor checking the article is not always from the same department as the author (e.g. from science or sport) In other words, the editor is not necessarily familiar with the topic.

30. Interview with Uwe Gradwohl (Baden-Baden, 29 July 2005).

31. It is not the interviewed scientist who is the author of the article, but the journalist. The scientist is – even if this sounds very matter-of-fact – the subject observed by the media.

32. Interview with Udo Zindel (Stuttgart, 9 August 2005).

33. Interview with Markus Bohn (Baden-Baden, 10 August 2005).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Diane Scherzler MA works as an editor for a major German Public Broadcasting Company. She has been concerned with the subject area 'science, the media, and the public'. Diane Scherzler gives media training to academics, is visiting lecturer at Tübingen University and advises scientific organizations that want to improve their collaboration with journalists.

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ABSTRACTS

Journalistes et archéologues : comment traiter de façon constructive avec les mass-médias
Diane Scherzler

Durant ces dernières décennies la conscience publique a été déterminée de façon croissante par les mass-médias. Pour bon nombre de gens, télévision, radio ou presse écrite sont les seules sources pour des sujets archéologiques et il est donc indispensable que les scientifiques sachent communiquer avec le monde du journalisme. Non seulement les histoires sensationnelles assureront la couverture, mais également des nouvelles sérieuses – si elles sont bien racontées. Néanmoins la communication de résultats scientifiques à un public non spécialiste n'est pas seulement une question de bonne volonté, mais aussi d'aptitude. Cet article explique comment attirer l'attention des mass-médias, comment influencer la qualité d'un article de journal, d'une contribution à la radio ou à la télévision, et comment réussir à communiquer ce qui est vraiment important. Il fournit de même une vue d'ensemble des relations avec le public et avec les médias, et cherche à procurer quelques conseils utiles.

Mots clés: interviews, journalisme, mass-médias, nouveautés, archéologie publique, communication des sciences

Journalisten und Archäologen: Bemerkungen zu einem konstruktiven Umgang mit den Massenmedien
Diane Scherzler

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten haben Massenmedien immer stärker das öffentliche Bewusstsein geprägt. Für viele Menschen sind Fernsehen, Radio und die Presse die einzige Quelle für Themen aus der Archäologie. Deswegen ist es für Wissenschaftler wichtig, zu wissen wie sie mit Journalisten zusammenarbeiten können. Es sind keinesfalls nur die Sensationsmeldungen, die in den Medien eine Chance haben, sondern auch das Seriöse, vorausgesetzt, es ist gut erzählt. Die Kommunikation wissenschaftlicher Ergebnisse an ein Publikum außerhalb der eigenen Fachdisziplin ist jedoch nicht nur eine Frage des guten Willens, sondern auch des Könnens.

Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich darauf, wie man als Archäologe Massenmedien auf sich aufmerksam macht, wie man Einfluss auf die Qualität des Zeitungsartikels, des Radio- oder des Filmbeitrags nehmen kann, und wie man letztlich das vermittelt, was wirklich wichtig ist. Er bietet weiterhin einen Überblick über die Beziehungen zur Öffentlichkeit und den Medien und versucht, einige hilfreiche Vorschläge zu unterbreiten.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Interviews, Journalismus, Massenmedien, öffentliche Archäologie, Pressemeldungen, Wissenschaftskommunikation

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