JACQUETTA HAWKES – ANTIQUARIAN



This morning Christine Finn interviewed me for her new BBC documentary about Jacquetta Hawkes (1910 – 1996).

So much more than an archaeologist, Jacquetta Hawkes was a fascinating latter-day

antiquarian. This is why her academic archaeological colleagues tried so hard to make her marginal. And she was a woman.



Hawkes was notorious when I was an undergraduate at Cambridge. I was quite taken by

the range and scope of her writing – archaeology correspondent for the Sunday Times in London, she produced academic papers, children's books, guidebooks, monographic theses on ancient Egypt and the Mediterranean, lavishly illustrated commemorative volumes, poetry, plays, a script (for a wonderful movie about Barbara Hepworth), and a novel. To me she was the archetypical representative of establishment high-cultural sentiments and aspiration, socializing with the well-to-do literary and art world. Coming from the post-industrial working class wastelands of NE England, I was suspicious of how she clearly belonged to the class that considered the past their own, and it wasn't mine.

Her 1968 essay in the journal *Antiquity*, "The proper study of mankind", was something of a touchstone in the science wars in archaeology that Chris Tilley and I discussed in our book *Reconstructing Archaeology* (1987). Like us, she was strongly critical of scientism – the faith in the universal application of an absolute scientific and technical reason that was popular in the social sciences in the 1960s and 70s. Like us, but in a very different way, she was concerned with the way New Archaeology was diminishing a *human* understanding of the archaeological past and present. This is all still very relevant in the ongoing crisis in the Humanities [Link] [Link].

Christine has been arguing for a long while now that Jacquetta did more than popularise archaeology. I agree.

I see her as an antiquarian

– held by no disciplinary ties, free to range through all kinds of learning and expression in dealing with the past-in-the-present, with the folding of times past and present in our senses of place, with the complex negotiation of contemporary human identity through material trace and ruin.

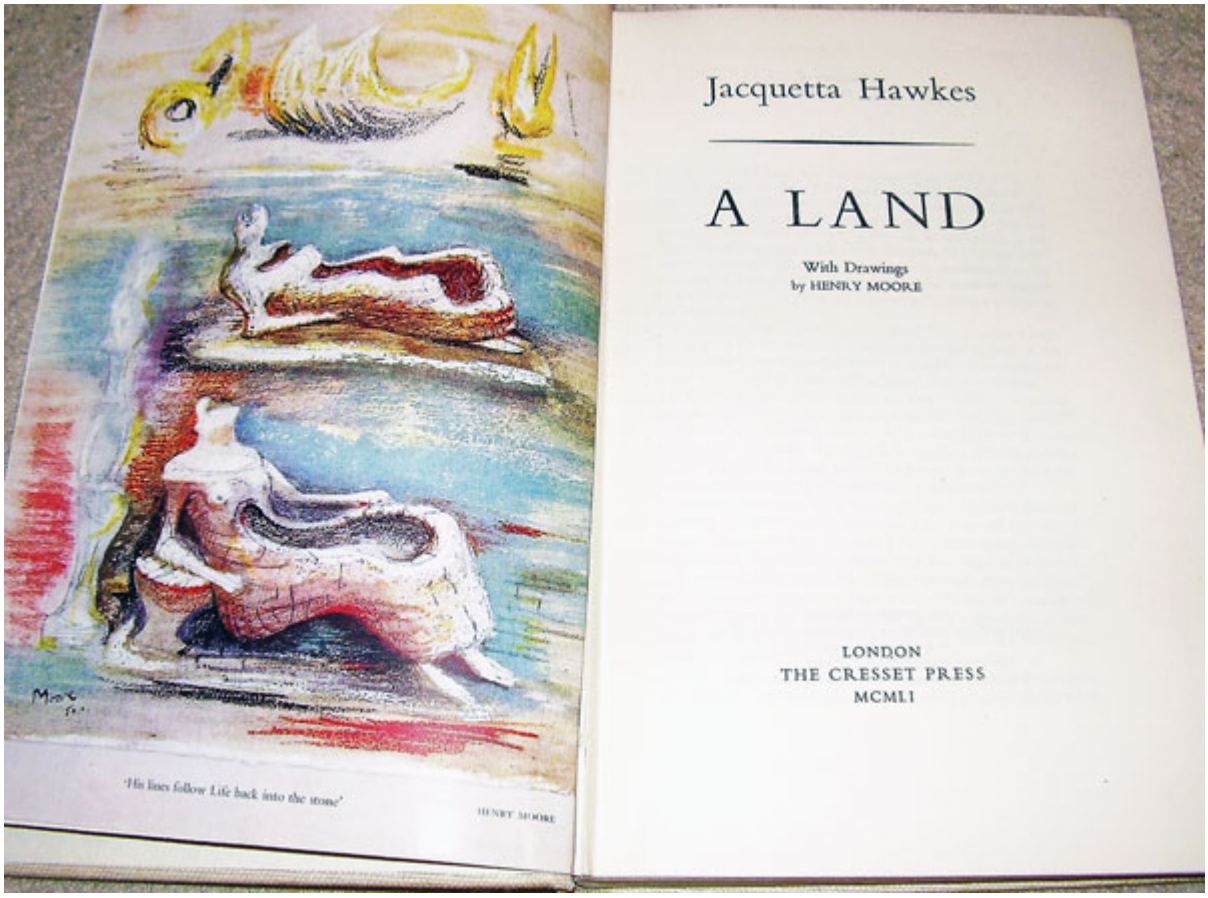
Hers was a sensuous engagement with the past in the present. She was an exponent of *the archaeological imagination*. With a very distinctive voice, she offered a paradigm of *creative* engagement.

In this she cast a shadow over those who laid claim to an engagment with the archaeological past that would see behind the artifacts to the people of the past. I recall well the small-minded arrogance of some of her contemporary archaeologists

– the likes of Glyn Daniel, Stuart Piggott and Christopher Hawkes, the grim negativity that lay behind their superficial humanism, behind their claim that they breathed life into the relics of the past. Daniel may have celebrated the delights of the cuisine of Britanny; Stuart Piggott may have entertained the notion of a social history of prehistoric Europe; Christopher Hawkes offered magisterial synthesis, but all exuded a deathly dullness that alienated so many of us.

A new edition of her *fabulous* book *A Land*, a prose poem about England, Britain, or rather Albion, appears in the Collins Nature Library – superbly reviewed last week by Robert Macfarlane in The Guardian – [Link]

… Her book is filled with strange rhymes, recapitulations and elective affinities: she explains how “Jurassic water snails” helped “medieval Christians to praise their God”, how ammonites influenced the plate-armour of 15th-century knights, and – who would have thought it? – why the hypertrophied nose antler of an early species of deer supplies a precise analogy for mid 20th-century western European consciousness. Hawkes possessed the synecdochic imagination of the gifted archaeologist, able to reconstruct whole beings from relic parts, and the near-mystical vision of the crime-scene investigator, able to attribute complex cause to simple sign. …



Jacquetta Hawkes

A LAND

With Drawings
by HENRY MOORE

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MCMLI



Jacquetta Hawkes and Robert Graves in Mallorca, 1950, no doubt discussing his work “The White Goddess”

Bradford University’s Hawkes archive – [Link]