

SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATING INTERNATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLABORATION

AN EAST-WEST EXAMPLE

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The coauthors of this paper, a Canadian, an American and an Indian, have engaged in international collaborative archaeological research that extends back, in part, over two decades. Petraglia and Korisettar met in 1987, and soon after embarked on a program of archaeological survey and excavation in the Malaprabha Valley of southern India that initiated a continuous 20-year ongoing relationship. The two currently co-direct, along with Boivin, the Kurnool District Archaeological Project, a joint Cambridge-Karnatak University study that is investigating prehistoric human occupation in western Andhra Pradesh, including that at the famous Kurnool Cave sites. Boivin and Korisettar began working together more recently, in 2002, when, together they initiated the Bellary District Archaeological Project, a study focused on investigating the emergence of domestication, sedentism, and, ultimately, more complex societies in southern India. They have since brought on board Petraglia and Dorian Fuller (of the Institute of Archaeology in London) as co-directors of the project.

Over the course of their long-term collaborations, the coauthors have learned many things, encountered many challenges, and made a few mistakes. On the whole, though, their strong collaboration is underpinned by an enduring friendship, deep mutual respect, and a strong sense of cooperation that has enabled them to achieve significant success in their research ventures. In considering the issue of international cooperation then, the coauthors feel that they potentially have some useful opinions to offer. They have tried to consider what characterizes their relationships and practices, as well as some of the lessons that they have learned over the years, that have helped them to achieve the level of commitment they currently share to their ongoing collaborative relationship, as well as the satisfaction they get from working with individuals who are by now as much friends as colleagues. Many of these issues relate to international collaborations in general; some are specific to Anglo-Indian collaboration and to the context of a resource-rich Western partner and resource-limited developing world partner that partly defines it.

Respect

One of the critical factors that all three coauthors agree is critical to successful international collaboration is respect. Researchers do not have to see eye to eye on all issues, but ultimately they should respect each other's ideas, work, and vision. If not, they are better off finding other people to work with. Respect is a key ingredient in any successful relationship, including an academic one, whether it is international or not. The challenges of working cross-culturally, and in different research environments, simply make respect all that much more important.

Trust

Trust plays a similarly important role in any international cooperation. It may seem obvious, but if you cannot trust someone, do not work with that person. International collaborations bring two or more different cultures together, with each side relying on the other to guide it in the foreign environment. Trust is critical to the success of such an enterprise when the parties are not in a position to fully or properly understand situations, actions, and problems encountered in the foreign context.

Reciprocity

Again it seems obvious—each side should get something out of the collaboration. Surprisingly, however, this is often one of the reasons international collaborations fail. The issue of reciprocity comes to the forefront particularly with collaborations between resource-rich partners from First World nations and resource-poor partners from the developing world. There may be certain expectations about what the collaboration will bring that are not met, and that therefore cause it to break down. This is also why it is important to be clear about expectations from the outset of the collaboration.

We believe there is particular risk of resource-poor partners suf-



Figure 1. Some members of the Kurnool District Archaeological Project team (along with some visitors). From left to right: Nicole Boivin, Hannah James, Ceri Shipton, Danica Ziegler, Sacha Jones, Ravi Korisetar, Kumar Akhilesh, Girish Patil (jeep driver), local visitor, Shanti Pappu, Kevin Cunningham, Jinu Koshy, Janardhana B. (Photo: Michael Petraglia.)

fering from a lack of reciprocity. A common pattern in international collaborations is for Western researchers to work with local researchers in other countries in collecting data, which is then returned to the West for analysis, interpretation, presentation, and publication. Ultimately, local researchers may see little benefit. It is thus critical not only that data analysis, interpretation and publication be conducted as an ongoing joint exercise, ideally involving meetings, workshops, and conferences in both countries, but also that reciprocity go beyond this to actually addressing the resource discrepancy that unbalances the relationship in the first place. Here we speak not of providing funds but of providing the training, access to literature, and opportunities that researchers in developing world institutions often lack. In India, the rapid economic development in the business and high-tech spheres that has launched the nation into the forefront of the world economy has not filtered down to the level of higher education, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. In archaeology departments and institutions, textbooks are generally outdated, libraries understocked (with new electronic resources barely tapped into), and training opportunities limited.

Accordingly, the co-authors of this article have placed a heavy emphasis on ensuring that their collaborative projects entail a strong training and teaching component. Field seasons are essentially field schools that involve not only field, lab and analytical training, but also, when possible, evening classes on method and theory, and opportunities for essay writing. The training is for both Indian and Western students, and, in the spirit of reciprocity, we also encourage students to teach, whether on archaeological subjects with which they have partic-

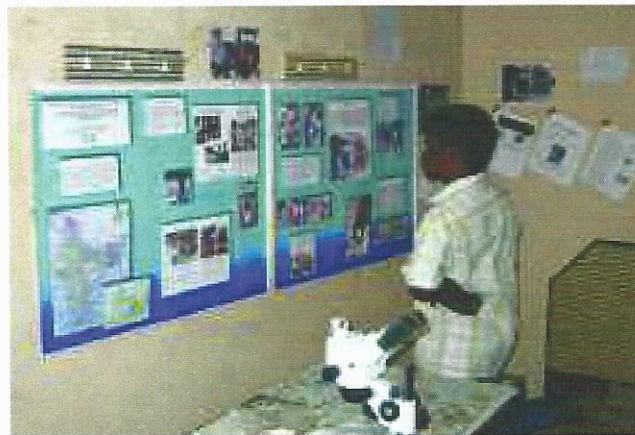


Figure 2. Project poster being read by a student in the field lab of the Kurnool District Archaeological Project. Kevin Cunningham produces such posters as part of an "in-reach" program that communicates the project's aims, methods and findings to team members. (Photo: Kevin Cunningham.)

ular familiarity or in providing training in the local language to Western students and researchers.

This naturally adds to our workload in what is inevitably already the busy field season of a large international project. However, these efforts have been more than rewarded by the successful training of a growing number of international students from India, the UK, Australia, and elsewhere. Our subsequent challenge has been to ensure that these students also find opportunities for postdoctoral and subsequent employment. We have prioritized the procurement of funds for employing post-doctoral students in India and have also sought to provide opportunities Indian students and early-stage post-doctoral researchers to spend time in the UK, allowing them to benefit significantly from the opportunity to participate in classroom learning, form their own prospective partnerships and collaborations, and access a wealth of otherwise largely off-limits literature.

We always feel that there is more that we can do, and we recognize that resource imbalance poses some intractable problems that such solutions barely begin to address. Nonetheless, through open dialogue about the needs we all have and the expectations we harbor, we strive to improve our methods of addressing it.

Publication

Publication, while to some degree an element of the reciprocity relationship, is such a critical factor in the academic context that we have given it its own section. Publication is probably one of



Figure 3. Michael Petraglia giving an evening class on lithic analysis to students in a hotel room as part of the Bellary District Archaeological Project field school. (Photo: Nicole Boivin.)

the thorniest issues to deal with, and one that extends beyond international collaboration to academia in general. Publication is critical to academic success, and also extremely (and only increasingly) biased in favor of researchers from wealthy, English-speaking countries, who not only can write without difficulty in the English language, but also have regular and continued access to a wide range of high-quality, peer-reviewed international journals, regular reading of which enables them to conform with relative ease to the stylistic and formal norms of the academic argumentation and writing within. One of the biggest complaints of Indian researchers is about the difficulty of accessing and successfully publishing in Western journals. Often their work is unpublished outside of the local Indian context, with the end result that much of the Indian archaeology in international journals is, paradoxically, written by Western researchers.

While it does not address the underlying issues we have outlined, one aspect of the reciprocity of our collaborative relationships does therefore attempt to address this problematic situation. We strive to be very inclusive in our publishing. This means firstly that most of our publications are multi-authored, and often include as coauthors not just those who write, but also those who were directly involved in collecting the data presented, be they students, postdoctoral researchers or sometimes even extremely committed local assistants. We also try to include the ideas, interpretations, and thoughts of those who find writing in English, for English journals, extremely challenging. The latter is not always easy, and to be fair, not always successfully realized given the imbalanced writing relationship, but it is a goal to strive for.

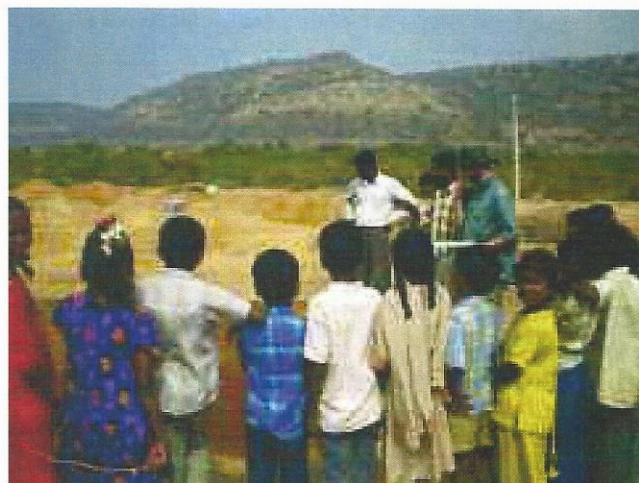


Figure 4. School tour of archaeological excavations provided by the Kurnool District Archaeological Project, as part of its public outreach efforts in the local region. Janardhana B. (back row, left) and Michael Haslam (back row, right) are introducing children to the site. (Photo: Kate Connell.)

Our coauthorship paradigm is not always easily accomplished, and has caused the odd researcher to baulk, but it presents a strategy that we have agreed to after extensive discussion and consideration and is the best and fairest that we can realistically achieve under the prevailing circumstances. Most experienced researchers recognize the situation, and the challenges it poses, and are more than happy to acknowledge the efforts of a large team in making publication possible. Ultimately, coauthored publication benefits everybody and leads to closer ties and greater interaction between team members.

Patience

Perhaps the most essential quality in international collaboration, however is patience—lots of it! Different cultural backgrounds, practices, norms, expectations, and values bring plenty of opportunity for misunderstanding, frustration and disagreement. People who let small things bother them will probably find international collaboration difficult. Usually a little patience goes a long way. Tolerance of difference is part of this equation, of course, and equally instrumental.

Communication

Communication is critical in any relationship, and it is particularly important in an international collaborative one. Beyond stating the obvious, it is perhaps worth emphasizing that email—always as problematic as it is useful—can be a particularly dangerous medium for international communication. There are too many opportunities for misunderstandings to



Figure 5. School visit as part of the Kurnool District Archaeological Project public outreach program. Ramadas, a local project volunteer from Bellary District, is providing an explanation to the children. (Photo: Kevin Cunningham.)

develop. Our rule of thumb is: when in doubt, pick up the phone. We are grateful for the way that email has facilitated international collaboration and rely on it heavily for everyday communication, but when something important happens, or when email leads to frustration or misunderstanding, we call.

Think as a team

Successful collaboration means thinking as a team rather than as an individual. Personal ambitions must always make way for group success. In addition, when times are hard, as they sometimes are for researchers embarking on international collaborations in India, then it is critical to stick together. We have been through some difficult and challenging times in the past, with political intrigue and changing power structures sometimes threatening our work (archaeology in India, as elsewhere, is often highly politicized), but we have stuck it out by maintaining a unified front and focusing on doing high-quality research together. This makes it difficult for others to challenge our right to carry out our collaborative work.

Celebrate successes together!

Finally, stop and celebrate the successes along the way—be they little or large—and do so together. We get together socially whenever possible, whether at the end of a day of fieldwork, or while engaged in international travel for other purposes, to talk, plan, gossip, complain, and, most importantly, celebrate the things we have accomplished together.



Figure 6. Students provide official visitors with an explanation of ongoing excavation work (and site destruction) as part of the Bellary District Archaeological Project's efforts to publicize the importance of and current threat to the region's cultural heritage. (Photo: Dorian Fuller.)

While we have conducted successful research together for many years now—the results of which have appeared in a range of regional, national, and international journals and been presented at conferences worldwide—we are perhaps most proud of measures of success that are frequently less valued in the hyper-competitive world of academia. These include, for example, a highly successful public-outreach program in Kurnool that has seen engagement between local villagers and archaeologists, school tours, and other exciting initiatives. In Bellary, efforts to publicize destruction of cultural heritage as a result of illegal quarrying and other activities have contributed to the successful procurement of government funds for site protection and a local museum. In particular, we are all proud of the many students, Indian and Western, who have worked with us over the long term (and shown us great tolerance and patience) and, through hard work and dedication, transformed themselves into an impressive, highly skilled, and promising next generation of archaeologists. We are certain that they will go far in developing and improving upon international collaborative strategies in a rapidly changing global landscape that will create new challenges and opportunities in the years to come.