

## BOX 1.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Archaeology is embedded in popular culture in many ways, including but certainly not limited to movies, television, news media, advertising, fiction, nonfiction, documentary film, music, comic books, games, and toys. Popular culture both promotes and uses stereotypes of archaeology and the prehistoric past. The way ancient times are portrayed is almost always ridiculous. Similarly, archaeologists in popular culture are almost always portrayed as treasure hunters, which they are not.

It has been said that archaeology is the most popular second choice for a career. If we take them at their word, this is true for celebrities as well as regular folk. Many celebrities associated with the entertainment world have indicated in published interviews that if the acting thing didn't work out, they would have liked to be archaeologists.

It may be that archaeology is so firmly embedded in popular culture because of the stereotypical image of archaeologists – adventurous, smart, good-looking, and fit. The guru of research into archaeology as popular culture is Cornelius Holtorf. In *Archaeology Is a Brand! The Meaning of Archaeology in Contemporary Popular Culture* (2007), he identifies key themes in

the portrayal of archaeologists in popular culture: as an adventurer, a detective, making profound revelations, and taking care of ancient sites and finds. In *From Stonehenge to Las Vegas: Archaeology in Popular Culture* (2005, 44), he writes: “Featuring the archaeologist as popular stereotype, the archaeological romance of eerie adventures involving exotic locations, treasure hunting, and fighting for a good cause has become a widely used theme in popular culture.”

One of the dangers of the depictions of archaeology in popular culture is that as the real objectives and methods of archaeology are rarely portrayed, there is an increasing tendency for others to see archaeology as a frivolous activity. This may be more important for archaeology than other disciplines. In surveys asking how people learn about archaeology, the overwhelming majority of responses are invariably linked with popular culture sources, especially television. Also, as traditional sources for funding archaeological research become reduced and increasingly competitive, television and other media are increasingly picking up the slack, which leads to decisions about what gets funded lying in the hands of those in media and entertainment rather than science.