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All of This Has Happened Before...

An interview with Professor Amanda Vincent
Archaeologist, University of Toronto

What's new in archaeology?

We have actually a tremendous body of material that's been collected over the past century or more, and a lot of that material has been largely sort of reburied, if you will, in archives and museums and so forth, and hasn't really been fully exploited for the kinds of information that it can give us. Not only just about the past, but also I think insights into contemporary issues. For example in my case in dealing with the conflicts in the Middle East, trying to understand better how those have come to be is a big part of the kinds of questions we're interested in. Archaeologists, while they like to discover new things, also tend to be rather proprietary of their data. And so I'm very excited about the prospect that we've actually got people talking to each other and opening up and sharing their data.

What does this mean for the future?

One of the things that we can bring into those discussions is the kind of rich time depth. We look at changes over time at a pretty high level of resolution that can span many thousands of years of human history. And so we can look at questions about health, questions about environment, climate change, things like that. We can look at the anthropogenic or human factor in those kinds of issues. I think that discovery is really important, something innately part of who we are as human beings - I think trying to learn new things, discover new things, but also trying to better understand who we are and why we've come to be who we are, where we find ourselves today. I think that these are fundamental questions that drive all of us.