

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

THE outstanding archaeological event of a decade rich in surprises has been the discovery of the Indus Civilization and the publication of Sir John Marshall's account* thereof. Now an unknown civilization, if it turn up far away and isolated from more familiar ground, may leave the European archaeologist cold ; we are naturally preoccupied with our own continent and the adjacent zones of North Africa and Hither Asia from which Europe received enlightenment. No such aloofness is possible in the case of Mohenjo-daro and the civilization it represents. A whole series of links, from precious stones of Indian origin down to imports of actual Indian manufactures, establishes beyond all shadow of doubt the intimate connexion between the valleys of the Indus and of the Tigris-Euphrates round about 2500 B.C. And right on the frontiers of Europe two highly specialized types of gold bead from the 'treasures' of Troy demonstrate the westward extension of the same nexus.



These discoveries are revolutionary : they demand a complete reorientation of our attitude towards the birthplace of civilization. The rôles of Egypt and Babylonia have been familiar from ancient tradition. Romantic faith in the legends of Greece led Schliemann

* *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, 1931, 2 vols. £12 12s. (Arthur Probsthain, 41 Great Russell Street, W.C.1).

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to Troy and Mycenae. Strictly scientific induction guided a man of genius to Knossos, where by a stroke of the spade he was able to set the products of Schliemann's digging in their proper context. But in India the by-products of railway building catching the enlightened eyes of Sir John Marshall revealed a civilization that had lain absolutely forgotten for 4000 years.



This discovery has enlarged the domain of scientific prehistory, the area for which we may hope to establish a reasonably coherent system of knowledge, by some 750,000 square miles. In seeking the cradle of civilized life we are no longer restricted to Breasted's 'Fertile Crescent' balancing the relative claims of Egypt and Sumer. The Nile indeed is found to be on the western edge of a vast constellation of centres of urban life.



The intercourse between India and Sumer now established opens up a vista of caravans traversing the intervening deserts and crossing the mountain barriers, range after range, and of ships ploughing the waters of the Erythraean Sea 4500 years ago. That may help to banish the uneasy scepticism the more imaginative of us must feel when we read of Merchant Venturers in Bronze pushing up the Danube valley, or Ancient Mariners crossing the Bay of Biscay and rounding Cape Wrath leaving a litter of megalithic tombs behind them.

Again, the intercourse newly revealed was between highly differentiated and individualized civilizations. Mohenjo-daro is stamped with distinctively Indian idiosyncrasies, just as surely as pre-Sargonic Kish and the prehistoric graves of Ur are emphatically Sumerian and Old Kingdom Egypt is unmistakably Nilotic. Art and Religion, metallurgy and jewelry, are already completely specialized and exhibit arbitrary peculiarities which have persisted for millennia, some even to our own day.



But that circumstance demands an enlargement of our chronological horizon no less drastic than in our spatial outlook ; the revolution is not confined to Euclidean space but invades the new space-time. For, underlying the very real differences between the three great civilizations, and transcending the superficial agreements resulting from mutual

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intercourse, are fundamental uniformities so deep-seated, so comprehensive and so numerous, as to preclude the idea of independent origin in three areas later so closely interrelated. And indeed hints of connexion, vastly earlier than those hitherto considered, are not wanting. Lapis lazuli derived from Afghanistan is found in early Predynastic graves in Egypt ; a bead of amazonite from the Nilghary Hills of India was dug up from a prediluvian layer at Ur. And from hundreds of mounds extending westward from the Indus through Waziristan, Baluchistan and Seistan Sir Aurel Stein has collected sherds of painted pottery, fragments of stone vases, female figurines, stamp seals and beads of lapis or hard stone that must somehow link on with the similar material turning up at the base of every ancient site in Assyria, Babylonia and Elam. Whatever conclusions a scientific examination of the mounds and sherds may eventually justify, the scraps of evidence available suggest a continuum of less highly specialized cultures from which the Indian, the Sumerian and presumably even the Egyptian eventually crystallized out. But the process of differentiation, complete before 2500 B.C., must have taken very many centuries. And yet all these shadowy cultures emerging from this hoary background already possessed copper !



Here is a field for speculation. It might more profitably be regarded as a field for work. The province newly attached to the system of European-Oriental prehistory lies wholly within the British Empire. The conservation and proper examination of documents so vitally significant for human history is entrusted in an unique degree to us British and to our Indian fellow-subjects. A magnificent beginning has indeed been made ; thanks to Sir John Marshall, Mohenjo-daro has been excavated in a fitting manner, and, what is still more creditable, the results up to date have been published with a promptitude almost unprecedented in the annals of Oriental research. Sir Aurel Stein has undertaken a thorough survey of a vast and most inhospitable territory and has published, again with commendable rapidity, two richly illustrated reports on the epoch-making results of his tours. But this is only a beginning ; the prehistoric riches of India have only been scratched ; the results raise more problems than they solve.



It is an obvious duty for every citizen of the Empire to insist on the importance of preserving these sites against spoliation whether by

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road-contractors or relic-hunters. To expect and demand much Governmental support for excavation in the present economico-political situation is manifestly vain. And those who have the knowledge, the time or the money must be ready to assist in the work of conservation, excavation and examination. What an opportunity these *tells* offer English capital and English science for probing back towards the beginnings of human culture! What a scientific career for anyone with the vision—and the knowledge!



Writing in the *Revue Archaeologique* (July-October 1931, 211) Dr Salomon Reinach, one of the editors, says :—‘It is not enough, apparently, that the world should contain ten times more journals of art than it needs, and that new ones should be incessantly cast upon it. Now there is added a swarm of “Museum Bulletins” so numerous that it has become quite impossible to know of their existence and profit by them. For a long time past I have been appealing for a congress of librarians to discuss a remedy for this overproduction by putting on the black list superfluous publications, but it is the voice of one crying in the wilderness’.



We sympathize with the learned doctor, but not with his proposed remedy, which would in any case be quite ineffectual. The business of librarians (and, we might add, of learned societies) is to canalize, not dam, the waters of learning. We need more bibliographies. In England we have the nucleus of a bibliography of British archaeology in Sir Laurence Gomme’s Index of Archaeological Papers, 1665–1907 and its supplements for 1908 and 1909. To have allowed this splendid work to be discontinued was a crime. In its published form the Index is difficult to use, but to transcribe its contents on cards (omitting a certain amount of rubbish) and rearrange them under subject-headings is not a superhuman task, and has been partially accomplished by the present writer. To complete it down to 1931 would be a formidable undertaking, but one not beyond the powers of the various archaeological societies devoted to the advancement of knowledge if each would become responsible for its own publications and card-index them.