

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

NO one would accuse ANTIQUITY of backwardness in asserting the claims of archaeology to be recognized as an important element in general culture. Archaeology has revealed the pedigree of man and traced the evolution of his civilization to its sources. The knowledge thus acquired should form a part of the cultural background of every educated person ; and it should be supplemented by at any rate the rudiments of earth-history. We are still far from the time when education shall have achieved these results, which may be postponed until the present phase of intensive nationalism has produced the inevitable reaction.



Archaeology has completely revolutionized our ideas about man's place in nature and about the origins of culture, just as astronomy has revolutionized our knowledge of the universe. To appreciate this, one has only to compare modern conceptions with the primitive folk-tales that formed the basis of culture a century ago. The positive results are so devastatingly complete that we can afford to consider the limitations of archaeological method with impartiality. When we can discover an Indus civilization, we need not be unduly troubled because we do not know the name of the man who built Stonehenge. Nevertheless, to be perfectly fair, let us admit that at the bottom of our hearts we should all like to know something about him.

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The two methods are admirably illustrated by the story of King Alfred and the Danes. The facts as we have them from historical sources are almost too well known to mention. The Danes began by raiding England, and eventually conquered it and settled there. They were resisted by Alfred, to whose efforts we may ascribe the exclusion of Wessex from that settlement, and the confinement of the Danes to the region northeast of Watling Street. Were we dependent solely upon archaeological evidence, we should know little or nothing of the Danish invasions—a few weapons that might have been imported and some sculptured stones are practically all we have to show. The rare earthworks they constructed are ascribed to them on purely historical grounds; not one of them has been excavated. We might infer an invasion from the existence of defensive earthworks constructed against them by the Saxons; but here again the case is hypothetical, for neither have these been excavated. We might know of Alfred as a man who lost a valuable jewel in Somerset; but there could be nothing in this to associate him in any way with the Danes.



What could archaeology tell us of Caesar's invasion of Britain, or of Alexander's conquests? It may be argued that it was the subsequent invasion of the Romans that really counted historically, and that there is abundant archaeological evidence of this. But that argument will not hold in the other case, for it was Alexander himself who did all the conquering, and without him it is pretty certain that the influence of Greek culture could never have penetrated those regions. Again, archaeology has so far revealed no traces of the great voyages of discovery of Pytheas and the Phoenician circumnavigation of Africa, of Christopher Columbus and Sir Francis Drake. And what concrete archaeological remains are there of St. Columba's foundation? Nothing commensurate with his achievements. The great pioneers of human progress elude our grasp through a defect—apparently irremediable—in the nature of our evidence.



On the other hand, archaeology sometimes comes very near to revealing achievements as dramatic in their way as those just mentioned. The Viking grave recently found in Canada, if authentic (see *ANTIQUITY*, 1938, XII, 232; it is still unpublished otherwise) would be proof of

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first contact between the Old World and the New, even if we were not already expecting something of the kind on historical grounds. The foreign stones of Stonehenge testify an undertaking of epic dimensions. But such glimpses are rare. There must have been great pioneers, leaders, discoverers, in all periods, prehistoric as well as later. It is arguable that some of the great figures of history did more harm than good, and the same may be true of the present day. But whatever views we may hold about this, it cannot be denied that they form part of history and that they elude the prehistorian.



Material progress is registered rather by useful inventions and discoveries than by meteoric appearances, by the discovery or invention of fire (and later of matches), pottery, weaving, agriculture, metals, the wheel and all those and other things consequent upon what Professor Gordon Childe has aptly called the First and Second Revolutions (*Man Makes Himself*, 1936). But these were probably communal and gradual processes for the most part, rather than the sudden innovations of a single individual.



Archaeology, in short, enables us to reconstruct, by inference and the creative imagination, the culture of groups. But it stands in constant need of cross-bearings from other directions to establish any given position. When, in America, Professor Douglass applied such cross-bearings by his invention of dendrochronology, it was found that both geological and archaeological dead reckoning was sadly out (*ANTIQUITY*, 1937, XI, 409-26). So too there is constant need of comparative material to check the assumptions of, for example, pot-study, as readers of Mr Casson's article in this number will realize (pp. 464-73).



The Prehistoric Society's excavations at Woodbury have finished for the year and have established many important conclusions. We do not like to anticipate the publication of the Director's preliminary report, which will appear shortly in the Society's Proceedings. Consequently we will only say that the site was occupied by an agricultural people during the earliest phase of the Iron Age ; and that the remains

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found have helped to explain a number of other already known sites. As President of the Society and initiator of this, its first excavations, the present writer followed them with the closest interest. Not the least valuable part was the experience of excavation gained by the volunteer members who took part. It is intended to excavate the site completely, and the excavations will be resumed next March. A programme of operations has already been drawn up, embodying the results of last season's experience. The whole cost of the work was borne by voluntary contributions from members of the Society and others, and the money thus raised was all spent. (The accounts will be circulated to subscribers on the conclusion of the excavations next year). Meanwhile, since the Prehistoric Society has no reserve fund for this purpose, several hundred pounds will have to be raised before March. The present writer appeals to all who read this to support a live undertaking and send a contribution to Mr E. M. M. Alexander, Hon. Treasurer of the Prehistoric Society, c/o British and Medieval Antiquities, British Museum, London, W.C.

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As usual at this time we remind our Subscribers of the completion of a volume, and the related subject of subscriptions, without which this Journal cannot exist. We therefore ask them to give attention to the notice and envelope inserted in the present number. An early response will save Subscribers and Editors trouble—the former from receiving later reminders and the latter a certain measure of anxiety.

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