

Antiquity

A Quarterly Review of Archaeology

VOL. IX No. 35

SEPTEMBER 1935

Editorial Notes

IT has been said that 'all attempts at imaginative creation are merely rearrangements and combinations of known facts'. The facts of archaeology are stored in museums, where they may be arranged according to any one of several systems—geographical, chronological, or both. Or 'imaginative creation' may select and arrange specimens so as to illustrate either the evolution of some special craft, such as fire-making, pot-making, fire-arms, or a subject, like magic.



There is no need to appraise the relative merits of these systems, for each has many, and there is—or should be—room for all in a civilized country. After conservation, the one thing essential in a public museum is that it should interest the public and be intelligible to them, and not misleading. It may be opportune to set down some impressions of recent exhibitions, temporary and permanent, leaving to others the invidious task of drawing conclusions.



In the Museum of the Trocadero at Paris there has been held a most interesting temporary exhibition, arranged by Monsieur Vayson de Pradenne, designed to illustrate the methods of hafting stone implements. The outstanding feature of this exhibition is that it is

ANTIQUITY

arranged in accordance with the strictly anthropological method of Tylor and Pitt Rivers ; that is to say, that modern primitive devices are used to elucidate the culture of prehistoric man. For instance, one of the problems of prehistoric archaeology is—how did palaeolithic man hold his ‘ hand-axes ’ (coups-de-poing, bifaces, bouchers) ? Did he mount them in a handle, or merely use them unhafted in his hand ? Monsieur Vayson de Pradenne demonstrates, by selected specimens, that the butt-ends of Chellean axes were generally left unworked ; but he suggests that when (as in the subsequent Acheulean period) the butt-end was chipped to an uncomfortably sharp edge, some such substance as gum or clay was stuck on to provide a grip and prevent the sharp edge from cutting the hand. A stone axe of palaeolithic type from California, with just such a gum ‘ empougnure ’, is exhibited to illustrate this possibility. It is of course legitimate for anyone merely to guess at the possible uses of an implement he has never used ; but it is far more convincing thus to cite parallel instances from living, or recently extinct, cultures.



The exhibition also contains specimens to elucidate the hafting-methods of stone adzes, clubs, mallets, net-sinkers and anchor-weights (often indistinguishable from throwing-stones and even miners’ hammers), notched and other knives (with instructive Eskimo parallels) ; spears and arrows ; and a most interesting collection of agricultural implements, such as sickles, digging-stones and tribulums.



Space forbids any account of the permanent exhibits of the Trocadero, which has recently developed into a museum of the first importance, abounding in suggestive anthropological parallels, such as that between the modern church paintings of Abyssinia and the Esthonian woodcuts of precisely similar religious subjects. Archaeologists will profit greatly by a visit. (The museum is open throughout public holidays, including any Monday that may be included).



The custom of holding temporary ‘ topical ’ exhibitions has recently been adopted by the prehistoric department of the British Museum. At the moment of writing there are two, closely connected—one illustrating Mr C. W. Phillips’s excavation of the Giants’ Hills long

EDITORIAL NOTES

barrow at Skendleby, Lincs. ; and another of neolithic pottery from Yorkshire long barrows, collected and arranged by Miss N. Newbigin. Both are full of interest. One is struck by the great advance of technique since Canon Greenwell's time ; making possible the detection of traces of hurdle-work in a damp chalk mound 4000 years old, and the exhibition of a finished model of it within six months of its excavation. The use of plans, models and photographs, both here and amongst the permanent exhibits, is a welcome new departure, and one that is obviously appreciated by visitors.



With the Trocadero still fresh in mind one passes hurriedly and with averted glance through the Ethnographical Gallery ; ashamed that the anthropological wealth of a mighty Empire (or is it a Commonwealth ?) should have to be crowded into a room no bigger than a small suburban garden. One crosses a wooden bridge and enters a clean room full of light and modernity, devoted to the dawn of civilization in the East. Here in the Babylonian room are displayed, amongst other things, the glories of Ur which have just been so finely published by Sir Leonard Woolley. Against one of the walls are no less than seven cases of prehistoric painted pottery from Arpachiyah, Jemdet Nasr and the lowest levels at Nineveh.



The wealth of material and the skill here displayed is in striking contrast with the poverty of the adjacent land of Palestine. Year after year the ancient sites are searched by optimists, but only rarely do the results justify the labour invested. The discovery of inscribed potsherds of the period of Jehoiachim (608-597 B.C.), recorded in the *Illustrated London News* (6 July, p. 19), is a notable event, connecting the archaeology of Tell Duweir with the recorded history of Lachish. These finds, and others, have been exhibited at the Wellcome Research Institution (183 Euston Road, London). The site is being excavated by Mr J. L. Starkey, Director of the Wellcome Archaeological Research Expedition to the Near East.



Not the least interesting remains are the caves, which were inhabited during the third millennium, and when subsequently abandoned were used as burial-places. Is it possible that here in Palestine and Syria

ANTIQUITY

there may be found a continuous evolution from the natural cave of mesolithic and earlier times (which was used by the living and the dead), through these rock-hewn dwellings and tombs to the megalithic imitation-cave (if such it was, as we have long suspected), erected above ground? The possibility is worth bearing in mind, if only as a working hypothesis; for, if verified, it might help to explain the megalithic sequence on our own western Atlantic sea-board. We shall look forward to seeing the published accounts of the excavations.



Finally, at the Burlington Fine Arts Club was exhibited a *recherché* collection of museum specimens of primitive art (admission was 'by invitation' only). The effect of seeing so many primitive masterpieces in one room was rather disturbing, like a visit to a mental hospital. One turned with relief to the Eskimo ivories, which at any rate display the healthy naturalism of the hunter. None of them however can equal in excellence the scratched scenes of Eskimo life done on a walrus-tusk for Lenin, but which somehow failed to reach him and is now exhibited in the Trocadero at Paris.



The term 'primitive' is of course correct according to current usage; but one wonders whether these horrible idols from the marginal Pacific and African wilds are *really* primitive, or not rather degenerate? In this connexion Monsieur Vayson de Pradenne's theory is of interest (see pp. 305-10). When we find examples of art which is primitive in the literal sense of the word, as on the walls of caves in France and Spain, and on African rock-shelters, that art is, by universal consent, neither crude nor repulsive.



An excellent idea was to leave on the table a folder with press-cuttings. It was interesting to read them after a first inspection of the cases, and then to have another look at some. If only a similar practice were possible in the book world! Of the criticisms, that of Mr Frank Rutter (*Sunday Times*, 2 June) struck one as the best, that is to say, the one that coincided most nearly with one's own.