

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

THE word 'propaganda' is in bad odour today because methods of propaganda have been adopted that are not only indefensible in themselves but also ineffective for the achievement of the desired results. Scientific facts have been perverted for purely political purposes. With such crude and dishonest efforts archaeology can have no dealings.



But there are other methods that can produce results of the utmost value. Essentially such methods consist of supplying a demand, of giving the 'victim' something he wants rather than of trying to force on him something he doesn't. Applied to archaeology the first of these two methods may be explained as follows, where two countries, A and B, are concerned. A is a country whose archaeologists have organized an expedition to conduct excavations in B. Formerly such expeditions were little better than looting-raids on behalf of museums and collectors. They robbed tombs, took only the showy stuff, kept no records and published no report. Nowadays the keynote is co-operation with the people of the 'invaded' country. Now that the goodwill of Near Eastern countries is desired for political reasons, there is an opportunity to obtain it by these cooperative undertakings, which can ultimately achieve far more than the old-fashioned and rather short-sighted methods formerly adopted. We have in the British Council an organization which can employ this powerful weapon, and it is good news that use may be made of it. We take the opportunity of calling the attention of the British Council to the further possibilities latent in archaeological work conducted on these lines.

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It should, however, be recognized that archaeology is now no longer merely a hobby but a branch of science with techniques of its own, and that the pursuit of archaeology requires study and training; it has become a skilled profession. (There is of course plenty of room still for the amateur; but he would be the first to admit that he now looks to the professional for guidance, and cannot profitably work alone). Chief of these techniques is excavation. These facts, generally recognized in other countries—in Scandinavia and America for instance—are still ignored in some influential quarters in our own country. That is unfortunate, for archaeology can be used to create good relations between us and the peoples of other countries.



We are not indulging in a merely theoretical discussion. It would be possible to be much more explicit, but that might defeat our object. Out of many possible instances let us take that of a certain country in the Near East which was anxious to explore its own past by modern methods. The national institute invited the authorities of another and more advanced country to send them trained archaeologists who would carry out the excavation of an important ancient site. Expenses were shared and the work was successfully carried out. Good relations were thus established, and not only between the archaeologists concerned; for the organization necessary for such an undertaking involves contacts of many kinds, not least of all because the actual digging is usually done in some rather inaccessible spot where the closest contacts with farmers, peasants and others are inevitable.



But such an expedition always has indirect results as well. The students of the 'invaded' country go to the institute or university of the other to take courses of instruction; they learn the language and get to know the people and their ways. On their return home they spread that knowledge; and for the rest of their lives they look to that country as their 'spiritual home'. Some of them rise to high positions, in one case (which we have had in mind throughout) one of those former archaeological students is now Prime Minister. At a time when his goodwill is courted by rival countries it is natural that it should be inclined to the one which helped and encouraged him in his earlier days.

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There is every reason for our own country to adopt a similar policy and for it to have equally favourable results. Our people are always welcomed in other countries when they go there on a holiday or for purposes of archaeological study. The desire for collaboration is present on both sides, but the Englishman too often fails to obtain the necessary support at home. It is difficult and embarrassing to have to explain this official indifference, caused by the rather narrow and old-fashioned view of culture hitherto held here.



This is not the place to go into details or to suggest actual programmes; but such could easily be composed. Several are indeed present to mind in the writing of these Notes. One warning note, however, must be sounded; the policy here outlined is a long range policy. It will produce certain immediate results, but that is not its main purpose. It is a policy designed to forge cultural links that will withstand a long strain. It produces a mental attitude that may be decisive at critical moments. It creates an economic goodwill (in the business sense) that has far-reaching practical results. And why does it do this? Because its agents, the archaeologists and their associates are not mere propagandists with a specious and suspect mission; they are simply scientists or technicians carrying out a task. They are supplying a demand, giving not taking; and they are in no way compromising their integrity by this procedure. They are helping to develop the national culture, not trying to force a foreign one upon their hosts. Foundations of goodwill thus laid will in time support a lasting building; the other policy produces only shoddy structures of an ephemeral kind.



But it must be realized that such a policy demands full recognition of archaeology in the 'exporting' country. It is not possible to export if you do not create factories and train experts to make the goods. It is not possible to send out archaeologists to excavate if you do not encourage them at home. Pupils from other countries cannot be trained here if the necessary organization does not exist. We do our best upon the existing voluntary basis, but we are hampered and frustrated. Our case is excellent, but that is not enough; we must convince the jury. We must explain our work to the public; when we excavate we must invite people to come and visit the excavations and explain to

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them what we are trying to do in language they can understand. We must answer their questions, not tell them about types of pottery. ANTIQUITY has tried for years to do this, not without success. But whatever else may be uncertain it is clear that in the years to come archaeology will have to depend more, not less, upon state support, for voluntary sources will be more restricted. The actual amount required is infinitesimal, but it can produce practical as well as purely scientific results.



Quite apart from the particular case in point, it is incumbent upon us archaeologists to make contact with the general public, and by this is meant every one who is not a professional archaeologist. We must not expect government help unless we are backed by public opinion; and we shall not retain this backing (which we have already to a large extent) unless we make an effort ourselves. There are hundreds of people in this country willing to help us if we will only make it easy or possible for them to do so. Many of us do try and some succeed. But not all. One of our readers, writing to congratulate us on the special Sutton Hoo number, which he describes as the most satisfactory account he has ever read of an archaeological subject, continues: 'I do not know why it is, but most archaeologists write as if they thoroughly despise all the rest of mankind; they might as well write in a dead language! One doubts whether they all understand each other; perhaps they possess a glossary, kept secret in manuscript'.



Perhaps our correspondent does not make due allowance for the necessity of technical terms in any special subject; after all the columns devoted to sport, finance and motoring in the press are not always intelligible to the layman. But it is still true that archaeological articles are often written in a style that even experts find difficult to follow. Some of this obscurity would be clarified if the writer had always present in his mind the necessity of being understood by an intelligent non-archaeological reader. And today the necessity to do so is great. For in the future professional archaeologists will depend more and more for their support upon the intelligent members of the public, including those who control government funds; and mere common sense indicates the path to be followed.