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Editorial Notes

THE trite statement that we live in exciting times may be understood in various ways. Most people would understand it as looking forwards to a holocaust, and the prospect, though no doubt exciting, is apt to be depressing and to encourage a 'couldn't-care-less' attitude. In this context it refers to discoveries about Man's past, not to his future prospects. The best advice to those suffering from the prevalent epidemic of pessimism is to stop looking forwards, for after all 'it may never happen', and to look backwards at what actually did happen when the civilization we talk so much about was young and full of promise. Archaeologists of course have their heads permanently fixed in this position, and it is a fact that amongst them it is very rare to find one who 'couldn't-care-less'. The excitement of new discoveries crowding one upon another fires the imagination and gives a zest to life. One may be momentarily depressed by the prospect of annihilation, but one realizes that, even if 'it' should happen, most of the new knowledge (and much beside) will survive into a new era. Archaeologists deal wholesale in time, and there is a lot of it available before the sun grows cold.



There has been no lack of exciting new discoveries lately, and they have been duly reported in *ANTIQUITY*. Miss Kenyon has added a new chapter, the first, to the history of art. We call it the first because the Jericho heads are the earliest known examples of representative art and presumably ancestral to all that followed; whereas the palaeolithic cave-art, though earlier in point of time, seems to have died out. The main line of descent of all modern art is to be traced in the civilizations of the east and of the Mediterranean region. Incidentally one wonders whether there may not be an ancestral relationship between the Jericho heads and the alabaster portrait-heads placed in the Old Kingdom mastabas of Egypt? Though these may be as much as 2000 years later, they certainly had a ritual significance, as the Jericho heads probably had also. An alternative explanation would connect the Jericho heads with the mesolithic skull-burials of Ofnet and with head-hunting.



The most exciting recent discovery in Britain is that made at Stonehenge by Professor Piggott and Mr R. J. C. Atkinson and reported briefly in the *Times* (July 16th). It is that one of the great Trilithons there are carved the representations of a bronze dagger and bronze axe-heads. The dagger is not of the well-known Wessex type (though the axes are) but is square-shouldered with a narrow blade like the early Mycenaean daggers of the 16th century B.C. An actual dagger of later Mycenaean type was found in a round barrow at Pelynt, Cornwall, a little before 1845, but remained unrecognized until it was spotted in the Truro museum a few years ago by Professor Childe (*Proc. Preh. Soc.* for 1951, p. 95). The Pelynt dagger, he says, may 'be accepted as an actual import from Mycenaean Greece. From the type's chronology there, it could

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have been brought hither at the same time as the celebrated segmented fayence beads. So it not only provides welcome confirmation of the reality of Aegean trade with the tin land, but also satisfactorily supplements the Egyptian evidence for dating the circulation of the beads, and so the floruit of our Wessex culture, between 1400 and 1300 B.C.' Other links with the Aegean region may be found, as Professor Piggott reminds us in a letter, in the ingot of tin from Falmouth harbour, which is of a Mycenaean type, and the gold cup from Rillaton, copying shaft-grave types. It may be added that the Pelynt barrows are a compact group that is unique in Cornwall, and that they lie close to but just outside (north of) the linear earthwork called the Giant's Hedge which delimits a beach-head between Fowey and West Looe (see *Archaeology in the Field*, pp. 186, 242). Close by them runs a ridgeway, connecting Polperro on the English Channel with the main central ridgeway at Temple on Bodmin Moor. These collocations may be accidental; the date of the Giant's Hedge is unknown. What is most needed is a careful re-excavation of the Pelynt barrows, and an attempt to date the Giant's Hedge by excavation. This latter will be difficult because the hope of finding dateable objects in such an earthwork is not a good one.

The conclusion to be drawn, it would seem, from these three facts is that not only did Britain have trade connections (which might have been indirect) with the Eastern Mediterranean region in the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C., but that some people from there actually came to Britain and carved representations of their weapons on Stonehenge. For natives would surely have carved native, not foreign, types of dagger. There is a further point of possible connection with the south-east. Stonehenge is unique in being built of *shaped* stones; and the method of shaping them, by battering with stone mauls, was the same as that used for the granite obelisks of Egypt. The marks of battering may still be seen near the base of one of the stones. Did the foreign visitors introduce this technique?

On another page (164) we publish a discovery that certainly points to the spread of the technical knowledge from the Mediterranean into the heart of Europe, though the date is a few centuries later. A hill-fort in Germany has been found to have a wall of sun-dried bricks. Such a thing has hitherto been completely unknown. The route by which the technique may have travelled is uncertain and the probabilities are about equally matched.

All these things show that travel in prehistoric times, whether by land or sea, was far more extensive than we are apt to suppose. Probably we are too much influenced by ideas derived from histories of exploration. For every explorer who has left a record of his voyages there must have been dozens who did the same journey but left no record. The history of the exploration of Africa is full of archaeological evidence, of every period, pointing to unrecorded penetration.

One of the most exciting bits of news is that the Minoan (Linear B) script has at last been deciphered. The achievement is a triumph of amateur archaeology of which we can all be proud, for it was made by Mr Michael Ventris, who has promised, with his collaborator, Mr Chadwick, to contribute an account which we shall publish in the next number of ANTIQUITY. Meanwhile we will only say that the language is ancient Greek.