

Antiquity

VOL. XXVII No. 105

MARCH 1953

Editorial Notes

THE reluctance of primitive man to reveal his name is well known and is attributed to his belief that by so doing he surrenders a weapon that may be turned against him by evil magic. Perhaps that reluctance is not yet quite extinct; what logical reason is there for the dislike one has of revealing the intimate details demanded by the Passport Office? No respectable citizen need hesitate to set them down in writing, for, with the possible exception of those mysterious Special Peculiarities, they must be self-evident. Yet hesitation there often is. Is this reluctance counter-balanced, in either case, by a corresponding sense of triumph at the receiving end—a now-we've-got-him feeling? That certainly follows in zoos and museums when one reads the name on the label. It may be a primitive trait, but—let us be frank—are not we all rather unhappy unless told the animal's name, preferably in English, and its address; and when we have read it do we not have an absurd feeling of satisfaction? Perhaps it is to satisfy that crude yearning that some museum labels are but glimpses of the obvious, rejoicing to inform one that one is beholding, say an amphora of white terracotta. One had perhaps suspected that it was, but now reassuring to be told so!



The historical student is apt to be a willing victim of this name-magic. He will pore and puzzle over lists of place-names recorded, usually without any clues, in some ancient document. And when, as sometimes happens, he can identify one or two such with a known ancient site whose ruins are still visible, he sits back with just that sense of elation that the visitors to the zoo experienced. He has fitted one more piece of the jig-saw puzzle, added a brick to the temple of useless knowledge; he knows the city's name. He is as proud as if he had solved a cross-word problem. And is there any more justification for his pride? There surely is, for without identified place-names history is unintelligible; if the contemporary names cannot be used, the modern ones must take their place. (But this latter procedure is anachronistic, and to be adopted only in case of necessity).



The publication of Period Maps was initiated between the wars by the Ordnance Survey. The term was used because it covered both historic and also prehistoric periods. The series was a success, and one at least of the maps (Roman Britain) went a long way towards paying for itself, and the latest—that of Monastic Britain—is, we understand, well on the way to doing so too. The lead thus given was followed by Palestine, which

ANTIQUITY

has produced two excellent maps covering the Crusades and the Roman period. Closely connected with the Ordnance Survey venture was the International Map of the Roman Empire, now sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries of London, which is preparing a map of Roman Libya. The base-map is the International Map of the World on a scale of 1 : 1,000,000 (16 miles to the inch), which is admirably adapted for the purpose. It provides a great opportunity for an extension of the idea of Period Maps to cover the Ancient East. We now know the contemporary names of a large number of ancient cities in the ancient home of civilization, from Troy to the Persian Gulf and from Nineveh to Thebes. There is a considerable literature, archaeological and historical, and many students in every country. But the intelligent reader who is not a specialist is handicapped by the absence of any authoritative general maps on the area. Many of the books have index-maps of sites, often of poor quality and in the barest outline only.



The Fertile Crescent, which consists of Mesopotamia and Egypt, linked by Palestine and Syria, is completely covered by seven maps of the International Map of which Cairo (H 36), Damascus (I 37), Baghdad (I 38) and Basra (H 38) are the principal ones. It would be easy for specialists to compile maps showing all the chief known ancient sites and regional names on these sheets, giving both ancient and modern forms. Not every ancient mound need be shown, but only a selection; those which have been excavated would naturally be given priority. Why has this not been done? Probably because there is no individual or body to take charge and organize. The specialists have their own work to do, but could surely find time to compile the models. These do not call for draughtsmanship and their compilation (as distinct from the identification of ancient names with modern sites) is perhaps the easiest part of the job. It is the organization, fair drawing and the seeing through the press that takes time and labour; and that, apart from proof-correction, is not the job of an orientalist, but of some member of the organizing body. There would be no insuperable difficulty in carrying out such a project if it were adequately financed, and it would need far less money than some more ambitious but less useful undertakings. The organization would be entrusted to a committee responsible to a recognized authority. International direction is necessary because no less than eight sovereign nations are concerned, most of them without the experience and technical equipment required to produce the maps. For these reasons printing would best be done in Europe or America.



The usual objection made by specialists is that many of the ancient geographical names either cannot be identified or are controversial. That is no reason for not showing those—and they are also many—which are certain, and those—Jarmo and Hassuna for instance—which are already famous but otherwise unnamed and unlikely ever to be so. This hesitation is natural but fatal to progress; the best is always the enemy of the good. When the first edition of the map of Roman Britain appeared, there were still many names that had to be omitted; it was no more than a cartographic statement of what was then known. It set a certain standard by eliminating commonly accepted but erroneous identifications, which as a direct result have now been dropped. Its influence has been thoroughly beneficial, and its own errors and omissions have been rectified on subsequent editions. To wait for perfection is merely an excuse for doing nothing; perfection is unattainable in these matters. Publication is itself a stimulus encouraging research from which specialists themselves, as well as the interested amateur, will benefit.