

Notes and News

THE COUNCIL FOR BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY

Most Archaeologists are already aware of the recent formation of the Council for British Archaeology, which has been set up as a central body to express the views of those connected with archaeology, particularly with reference to post-war planning and development. The first meeting of the Council was held on 8 March 1944.

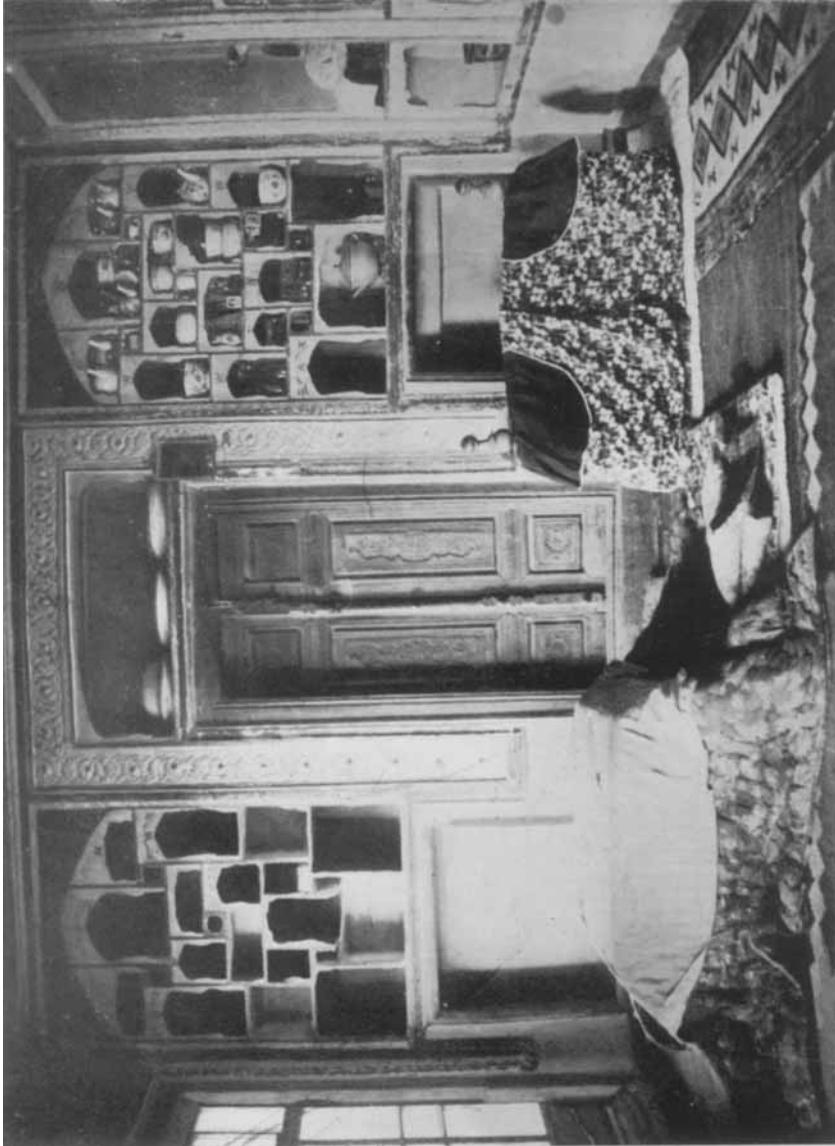
Every effort has been made to ensure that the Council is fully representative, as it is clear that it is only by showing that there is a strong body of opinion behind claims that archaeological matters should be considered in connexion with rebuilding and development, that due attention can be secured for them. The national societies concerned with archaeology and kindred subjects, the national museums, and universities including archaeology in their curriculum, have direct representation on the Council. The county archaeological societies, again including those dealing with kindred subjects, have been asked to form Regional Groups, which have a dual function—to elect representatives to the central Council, and to deal with matters of local rather than national significance. The Scottish Regional Group elects nine representatives to the Council, the Welsh Group six, and the eleven English Groups three each. In addition, the Regional Federations of Museums elect one representative each.

The most immediate task for the Council is that connected with post-war rebuilding and development. The task of ensuring that in the rebuilding of bombed towns, and in the development of new areas such as housing estates and roads, valuable archaeological remains are not destroyed without record is a tremendous one. It is in fact a task far beyond the resources of any individual society, both financially and administratively, and one which can only be attempted by the State. The responsibility of the State for the preservation and excavation of the material remains of the past is recognized by the Ancient Monuments Acts, and powers have been given under them to the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works. But to ensure that adequate finance is provided, sufficient skilled temporary staff engaged, and sufficient information given to enable excavation schemes to be prepared, the full weight of public opinion will have to be brought to bear.

In connexion with this, the Council has a number of functions. In the first place, it must act as the organ of this public opinion, and offer its advice and co-operation to the appropriate authorities. In the second, it must, either through the Central Council, or through the Regional Groups, draw attention to those areas in which ancient buildings and archaeological remains will require attention in any planning schemes. Thirdly, it must, through its Regional Groups and their constituent organizations, make arrangements for the recording and reporting of unexpected finds which may turn up in building operations, quarrying, or similar undertakings. Fourthly, it must co-operate in the provision of experts to undertake excavations and surveys, since this task will be too vast for the permanent staff of the Ancient Monuments Branch.

This immediate work of the Council is however only a beginning, though its urgency has been largely instrumental in calling the Council into being. There are many problems which will benefit from co-operative action and consultation. One of the

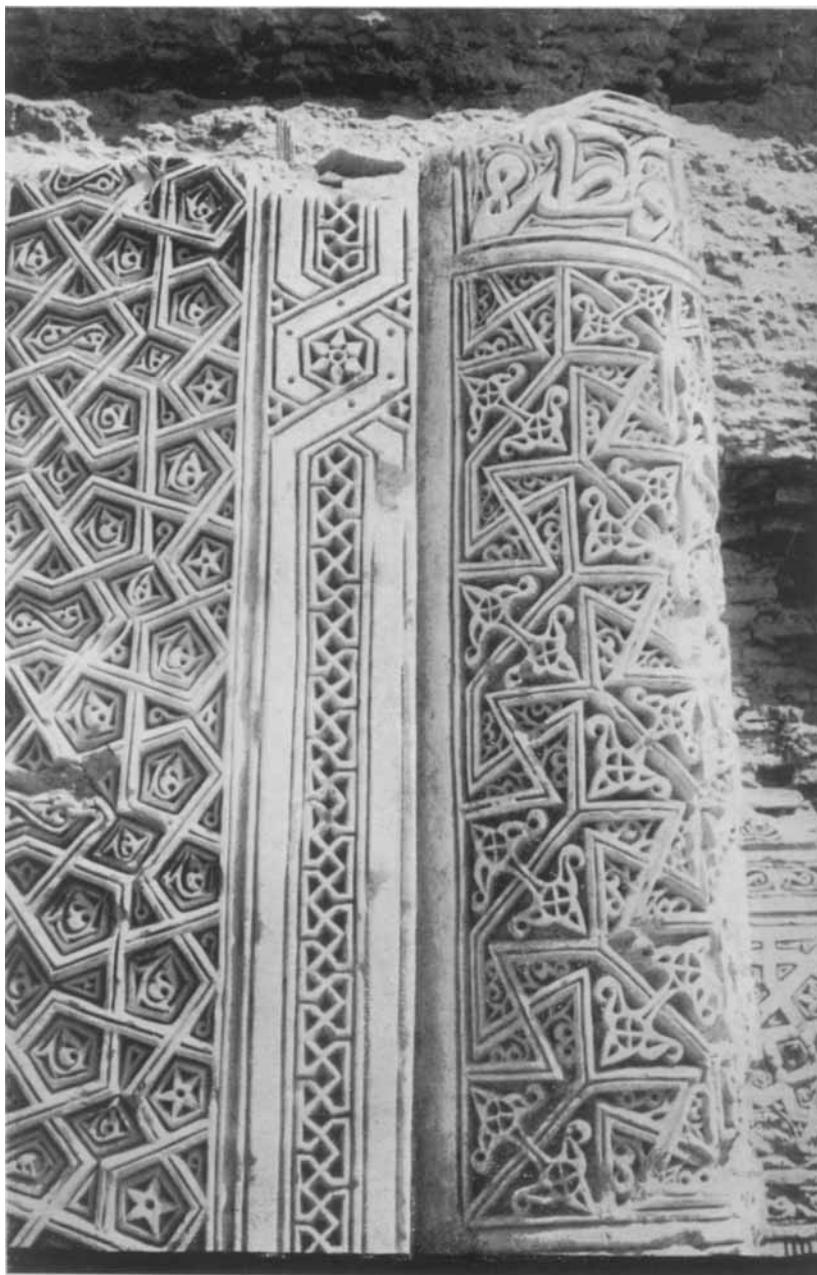
PLATE I



THE WINTER ROOM OF A HOUSE IN SAMARKAND

facing p. 158

PLATE II



TERMEZ PALACE : FRAGMENT OF STUCCO CARVING

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most important of these is the contribution which archaeology can make to education, which is a subject to which too little attention has been paid in the past, and which is so intimately connected with the justification of archaeology as a study. It must be considered, too, to what degree it is necessary to rationalize and direct research, in order to conserve financial resources which are bound for many years to be restricted, and whether this can be accomplished without curtailing that individual initiative which is so essential. These, and many other similar problems, will occupy the attention of the Council during its next sessions.

It is intended that the Council shall meet at least annually, and when normal conditions are sufficiently restored that these meetings shall take the form of Congresses held in different parts of the country. Meanwhile the meetings are purely for business, and are for the time being taking place in London, which is felt to be most convenient in war-time. An Executive Committee has been appointed to deal with urgent matters. The President of the Council is Sir Cyril Fox, and the Secretary, Miss K. M. Kenyon, Institute of Archaeology, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, N.W. 1.

THE REVIVAL OF ANCIENT TRADITIONS (PLATES I-II)

The ancient cities of Central Asia, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, Merv and Urgench are rich in fine examples of architecture. Many of these—the medreseh of Shir-Dor ('lion's gates'), the mausoleum of Shakh-i-Zenda, the mosque of Bibi-Khanim, the mausoleum of Gur-Emir with the relics of Timur and his grandson Ulug-Bek, are famous the world over. In a very remarkable way the architecture and art of Central Asia has continued the ancient traditions of its skill down to this day. The old masters living and working today in all the cities of Central Asia were taught by their fathers, and they in their turn are now imparting this knowledge to the younger generation.

In Uzbekistan everyone knows Shirin, the famous craftsman, the representative of the ancient family of Muradovs. Whole sections of Bukhara were built by different generations of this family. The renowned Bukhara master, the venerable Ibrahim Gafisov who built the palaces of the former emir, is still alive. The master craftsmen of carving, Shamsudin Gafurov (who has also made several beautiful models of ancient memorials), Kuli Djalilov, Akram, the artist decorator Mirbabaev and others, are widely known in Samarkand. These elders belong to that category of artist craftsmen, extinct in the West, who are now only known through the biographies of the Renaissance masters. These artist craftsmen scorn rest, and refuse the pensions which are provided for them. Their art is their life, from which only death can separate them. The works of these masters adorn the homes, tea rooms and buildings in all the towns of Uzbekistan, equally in the old and new city quarters (for instance, the interior of the Samarkand museum).

In order to maintain and preserve this art, special courses have been organized in Samarkand, in the medreseh of Shir-Dor, for the purpose of training craftsmen in the folk arts of engraving and carving on plaster and wood, as well as in decorative art. Under skilled traditional masters the Uzbek children, boys and girls of 12-16 years of age, are mastering the art of their people, combining these studies with general education. Usto Shirin and Muradov have been invited specially from Bukhara to direct the carving workshops.

These workshops of folk art are extremely interesting. Like the atmosphere generally, the methods and approach to the subject are quite different from those found in art schools. The workshop gives the visitor the feeling of being back in one of the Renaissance bottegas. This is exactly how the workshops of Verrochio, Ghirlandaio,

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Botticelli, must have been carried on. The masters wear workmanlike leather aprons. They are not called by their family names, nor by their titles, but simply *usto Shirin*, *usto Akram*, as once it was *messer Andrea* and *messer Domenico*. These children master their craft from childhood. Here, too, their artistic taste is developed. The relations between master and pupil are simple, almost patriarchal. Uzbek young girls (who would not have been allowed near the place before 1917) and boys, learn the art of carving directly on the material with a cutter. The pupil prepares the mixture of *gancha*, and moulds the slab. The master makes a drawing of the ornament on the slab and gives it to the pupil. Training begins by learning the material and instruments. The beginner usually sits between two older pupils who help him from time to time, just as *messere Domenico* and *Francesco Gramacci* helped the young Michelangelo in the workshop. The first plate (slab) is replaced by a second, then by a third and a fourth. The given designs become gradually more intricate.

After finishing these courses, the most gifted pupils are sent to architectural faculties of the University, where they come well-equipped with the knowledge of the materials, their technology and technique, as well as with the best creative traditions of their people.

The Western picture of the homes in Central Asia as gloomy with obscure walls and flat roofs, is far from correct. One has but to enter an Uzbek courtyard, look into the rooms, and that impression is soon dispelled. A very highly civilized form of interior, showing artistic taste, will be found. As the people are obliged to hide from the burning sun (and in the past, owing to religious laws were obliged to hide their wives and daughters) much care is taken to make the rooms attractive. It is not the custom to encumber the homes with much furniture. Niches and small closets are built in the walls and the homes are decorated with carpets. For many centuries the master-craftsmen in carving and decorative art have maintained the cultural traditions of interior decoration.

Now that Uzbekistan through its scientific agriculture is becoming a wealthy land, the arts are available to and desired by all. Therefore there is a growing need for first-class masters, architects, decorators and painters. Hence the organization of these workshops for the training of future traditional craftsmen and artists. These are not amateur workshops of a purely aesthetic or historically artistic value. They play an important part in the life of the Uzbek people. They are woven into the pattern of their daily existence.

Naturally, the cruel, grim war with Fascism, the foe of Democracy, could not fail to make itself felt in the life of far-off Uzbekistan, whose people are giving all their strength to gain victory. But nothing can stem the cultural development of the people. In the concentrated faces of the little boys and girls at the workshops of *Shir-Dor*, in their love for labour and art, we see the reflection of the encouraging future, which will be shaped by all these people, who revive and develop the best traditions of the great folk-art of their ancestors.