

Antiquity

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Editorial

AS this June 1959 number of ANTIQUITY is published it is almost exactly a hundred years since belief in the great antiquity of man was publicly declared in the rooms in Burlington House of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries of London. On the 26 May, 1859, Prestwich read a paper to the Royal Society entitled *On the Occurrence of Flint Implements, associated with the Remains of Animals of Extinct Species in beds of a late Geological Period at Amiens and Abbeville and in England at Hoxne*. Prestwich showed how the work of William Pengelly in Devon and Boucher de Perthes in north France had convinced him of the great antiquity of man. 'It was not,' he said, 'until I had myself witnessed the conditions under which these flint implements had been found at Brixham that I became fully impressed with the validity of the doubts thrown upon the previously prevailing opinions with respect to such remains in caves.' After Prestwich's paper, John Evans spoke about the flint implements themselves, and in her article 'Ninety Years Ago' published in this journal ten years ago, Dr Joan Evans reminded us of the circumstances of that meeting and of other meetings in that *annus mirabilis*, as it has so often and so wisely been called (ANTIQUITY, 1949, 122). John Evans wrote of Prestwich's paper that it 'would have been very good but he had only time to give an indifferent abstract of it and his voice was hardly audible in that room. . . . I had written an antiquarian letter to him to incorporate in his paper, and this he dexterously managed to leave behind him. The result was I had to stand up and give an extempore lecture. . . . There were a good many geological *nobs* there, Sir C. Lyell, Murchison, Huxley, Morris, Dr Perry, Faraday, Wheatstone, Babbage, etc., so I had a distinguished audience. Our assertions as to the finding of the weapons seemed to be believed.'

On 2 June, 1859, John Evans read a paper on the flint implements to the Society of Antiquaries in which he said, 'This much appears to be established beyond doubt, that in a period of antiquity remote beyond any of which we have hitherto found traces, this portion of the globe was peopled by men.' Both papers were well received: 'generally believed in', wrote Evans in his journal after the Antiquaries' meeting. In August of 1859 Sir Charles Lyell himself went to see the Abbeville pits, was convinced, and at Aberdeen on 18 September, in his Presidential Address to Section C of the British Association, and in the presence of Prince Albert as President, said that he was 'fully prepared to corroborate the conclusions . . . recently laid before the Royal Society by Mr Prestwich'.

The battle was won at last, as Dr Joan Evans wrote ten years ago, adding with good historical sense, 'It was an eventful week; the *Great Eastern* had just made its first Atlantic crossing; the men of the building trade had just struck for a nine-hours day; Brunel had died and Tennyson published the *Idylls of the King*' (ANTIQUITY, 1949, 123). It is useful and salutary, at this centenary moment, to look back at the nature and signifi-

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cance of the events of 1859. That same year, which saw the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* on 24 November, has brought forward in the last eighteen months a spate of lectures and books on Darwinism and Evolution. Not least among them, and most valuable to the archaeologist, is Loren Eiseley's *Darwin's Century* (London, Gollancz, 1959, 21s.). Dr Eiseley, who is on the staff of the University of Pennsylvania and is past president of the American Institute of Human Palaeontology, does not hesitate to quote, on his title page, Niebuhr's statement that 'He who calls what has vanished back again into being, enjoys a bliss like that of creating.'

The history of the study of antiquity is, in some ways, as important as its current development, and those who regard the present state of our knowledge in 1959 as an absolute, and not as a moment in the changing kaleidoscope of techniques, facts, interpretations and model-imposed prehistory, and who regard the study of 19th-century archaeology as nostalgia, are lacking in true perspective and wisdom. Camden referred to the 'back-looking curiosity' when he justified an interest in the study of antiquity; we are only beginning to realize that there are two aspects of this back-looking curiosity—the curiosity which drives us to study the remote past of man, and the curiosity which drives us to study how our predecessors studied their remote past. Sir Thomas Kendrick, this year retired from the Directorship of the British Museum, in his fascinating book *British Antiquity* (Methuen, 1950), gave us the story from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Camden. Professor Stuart Piggott in a series of articles and in his *William Stukeley* (Oxford, 1950) has done much to tell the story of the development of antiquarian study between Camden and Colt Hoare, and it is to be hoped that one day he will have the time and energy and inspiration to write for us a connected account of British Antiquity from the *Britannia to Ancient Wiltshire*. H. B. Walters's charming and stimulating *The English Antiquaries of the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries*, published in 1934, is already a quarter of a century old, and was, even at the time, only an essay.

But while the English antiquaries of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries have received attention, the history of archaeology in the 19th century has not yet received full and proper treatment. There have been, it is true, some initial and general studies like Michaelis's *A Century of Archaeological Discovery* and the present writer's *A Hundred Years of Archaeology*, but no one has, as yet, really given us an account of the development of archaeological ideas in the 19th century and related them to the development of Victorian thought. There is much to be done and many surprising discoveries to be made. Few people, for example, who read their Nilson and Worsaae at the present day can honestly say they are not surprised to find these books belong to the first half of the 19th century and not to the first decade of the 20th. What Worsaae, 'the first professional archaeologist in Europe', as he has been described, said about diffusion, independent evolution and cultural change before 1850 are now the commonplaces of popular books and lectures.

We have all been in the habit of thinking the Mesolithic a creation of the 20th century, and to look back at Allen Brown's use of it in the 1890s as a freak. But as Miss Judith Wilkins shows in her note printed below (p. 130) the idea of the Mesolithic had been set out by Hodder Westropp only a year after Lubbock had introduced the phrases Palaeolithic and Neolithic. Why was Westropp's idea of a Mesolithic not pursued? And, for that matter, why was Piette's idea not pursued; he had created a Metabatic Age—or Age of Transition—between what he called the Glyptique and the Neolithic? At present we can say that all these terms are a little ridiculous and almost as much fossil prehistoriography as the human fossils they describe are prehistory. But the evolution of ideas and concepts is so valuable to current scholarship if only in the deflation of complacency and smugness. We are no more at the height of prehistoric scholarship than were Thomsen, Worsaae, Gabriel de Mortillet,

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Pitt Rivers, Montelius, Sophus Muller, or Reginald Smith in their times. All the secrets of the prehistoric past are certainly not going to be revealed to the mid-20th-century generation, any more than they were to the mid-19th-century generation.

But that mid-19th-century generation—the generation of Layard, Rawlinson, Worsaae, Lubbock, and Daniel Wilson—did seem to pass through a more formative stage in the development of ideas than we are doing. To what extent was *The Origin of Species* one of those formative influences? It has been widely acclaimed as a major influence in the development of archaeology, but only, it seems to us, by those who have not really studied the development of archaeological ideas between 1810 and 1859. Darwin refused to discuss in *The Origin of Species* the relationship of evolution to man; he made this one cryptic statement on the general thesis in his book: ‘Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history’, and, as Dr Eiseley has noticed, in later editions of the *Origin* the sentence begins ‘Much light . . .’

It was not until 1871, in his *Descent of Man*, that Darwin really came out with his views on the relation of evolution to man, and by then T. H. Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature* had been published for eight years. The real value of Darwin to archaeology is that by his fine and reasoned argument he persuaded the world to accept the evolution of man. He was cautious, and Eiseley is right in admiring Darwin’s caution in not involving man in the dispute until much later, in refusing to do what Lyell was so accustomed to saying, namely, ‘going the whole orang’ at one go. As far as archaeology was concerned, Charles Darwin was the impresario who made the discoveries already made, palatable, reasonable, serious. It was a great service.

But the discoveries had been made by others; by Boucher de Perthes in the Somme and Pengelly in Devon, by Thomsen and Worsaae in Denmark, and, in 1857, the first Neanderthal skull had been found. It is fascinating that Darwin actually read Boucher de Perthes and years later humbly confessed ‘I . . . am ashamed to think that I concluded the whole was rubbish. Yet he has done for man something like what Agassiz did for glaciers.’ It is, historically, of interest that, as a result of this, Boucher de Perthes’s book is not among those which most affected Darwin; those were, as we are often being reminded at the present day, Malthus’s *Essay on Population*, and Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*. It is interesting to reflect at the present moment whether Darwin would have written a different *Origin of Species* if he had realized, as he clearly did not in 1859, the significance of the discoveries which were being made by Pengelly and Boucher de Perthes and Schmerling.

What, a hundred years from the *annus mirabilis*, is the most significant change in our knowledge of antiquity and our study of archaeology? It seems to us without any doubt not the accumulation of new facts like the knowledge of Palaeolithic art and the civilizations of the Sumerians, the Hittites, the Minoans, the Myceneans, and the Harappans, nor the development of scientific techniques of reconnaissance, excavation and interpretation, but the discovery of Carbon-14 dating. Here is something which Darwin and Huxley and Lubbock and Worsaae could not have thought of in their wildest dreams—that the antiquity of man could be exactly dated by scientific and non-archaeological means. Radio-carbon dating is the great revolution in 20th-century prehistory. The doubts that some have had about the validity of this technique, doubts that were summarized by Professor Milošević in his article in *Germania* (1957, 102–110) were dealt with, we had hoped, by Dr Barker in the December 1958 number of *ANTIQUITY*. But Professor Milošević writes to say that he is still dissatisfied and we will print later this year a short account from him of his doubts and dissatisfactions.

When all these are resolved we shall see in the next quarter-century the one thing that we are all waiting for—a complete and accurate dating of the main stages in the ancient

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development of man. We shall at last be able to write a truly historical—in the sense of a properly dated—prehistory of man. So important do American scientists regard radio-carbon dating that the *American Journal of Science* has announced the establishment of a *Radiocarbon Supplement* to be devoted wholly or largely to publication of radio-carbon date lists from laboratories in various parts of the world. Professors Richard Foster Flint and Edward S. Deevey, Jr., are the editors and the office of the *Supplement* is the same as that of the *Journal*, namely: *Box 1905A, Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A.* Volume I of the *Supplement* appeared in May 1959. Thereafter, one volume will appear each year. The *Supplement* will be separate from the *American Journal of Science* and will be sent to a separate subscription list; the price of Volume I is \$2.50. We have already referred to the cards supplied by the Committee for Distribution of Radio-Carbon Dates (ANTIQUITY, 1958, 193). It looks as though we shall all have to have, in addition to our cards and needles from Andover, our *Supplements* from Yale. And, armed with these, we shall at last bring a true historical sense to our apperception of prehistory. ANTIQUITY will attempt, as the years go by, to inform its readers about the main significant changes in our appreciation of man's past that come from Carbon-14 dating. We have already presented the remarkable results of Dr Kathleen Kenyon's excavations at Jericho (ANTIQUITY, 1959, 5), and the necessary reinterpretation of New World Prehistory which radio-carbon dating involves (Chester Chard, ANTIQUITY, 1959, 44; Bushnell and McBurney, ANTIQUITY, 1959, 93). Now it is suggested by Dr Seton Lloyd in his report to the Ankara Institute that Anatolia may well have earlier evidence of village and city life than exists in what Breasted called the Fertile Crescent (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 February, 1959).

At this centenary moment, when we look back to Prestwich and Evans in Burlington House in 1859, we see the immense possibilities for European, Asian, American, and African—not to mention Australasian—prehistory by radio-carbon dating. We are entering a new era in prehistory, and many of us are forgetting the drama of this moment. Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Religio Medici* in 1635, said 'Time we may comprehend, 'tis but five days elder than ourselves, and hath the same Horoscope with the World.' Thomas Browne was of course thinking of antiquity in the chronological terms of his contemporary, Archbishop Ussher, who thought that the creation and man dated from 4004 B.C. Time, in the 17th century we *could* comprehend, and the creation of man on the sixth day *was* only five days younger than the world. Can we comprehend time and man's antiquity today, when we are told that the world is millions of years old and that Upper Palaeolithic cultures flourished 35,000 years ago, and that man himself has been in existence for three-quarters of a million years? With a great effort we can comprehend it, but it is a new horoscope of the world.