

# Antiquity

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## Editorial

We published last year a photograph of that part of the beard of the Sphinx at Giza which the British Museum was returning to Egypt on permanent loan (1984, Pl. xvii), and said what a good thing this was. Dr I. E. S. Edwards, FBA, formerly Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities, was not so sure: and wrote a letter to *The Times* which was published, but not in full. He has now kindly allowed us to print his letter *in toto* (the cuts edited out by *The Times* appear in square brackets):

Sir, In your report (November 24) on the projected transfer to Egypt of the fragment of the Giza sphinx's beard and the head of its uraeus, you mention the precarious condition of the head and neck of the monument, and you also describe the measures which will be taken to give them support. Unfortunately the whole colossus is deteriorating, and the reason is not far to seek.

The sphinx lies in the middle of a large rectangular pit from which stone for the inner core of the Great Pyramid was quarried. The fact that the mass of rock from which the sphinx is carved was not removed when stone was required for the construction of other buildings in its vicinity can only be ascribed to the realization by the ancient quarrymen that they had reached a seam of poor quality and that more durable rock could be obtained from quarries situated not far away. Somewhat paradoxically, therefore, the very existence of the sphinx is likely to have been due, at least indirectly, to a cause which is now liable to lead to its destruction, namely inherent defects in the material in which it was carved. [A certain amount of make-up seems to have been used by its sculptors, but it is impossible to tell exactly how much of the filling which can now be seen is original and how much was applied in later times. When the whole figure was covered with a thin layer of painted gesso, additions of such a kind would not have been detectable.] Besides the beard and the head of the uraeus, a crown has become detached from the head; the socket into which it fitted provides the only positive evidence that it ever existed.

In view of the relative softness of the stone, it may seem strange that the sphinx should already have survived for some 4,500 years. The explanation is to be found in the simple fact that, for the greater part of its existence, it has been engulfed in sand and thus protected from wind and weather. [It is known that it was cleared of sand in the XVIIIth Dynasty by Tuthmosis IV, acting on a dream, before he ascended the throne (c. 1425 BC). The classical

historians, Herodotus (c. 450 BC), Diodorus and Strabo (both First Century BC), although they describe the pyramids, make no mention of the sphinx, the inference being that they did not see it because it was covered by sand. Pliny, however, writing in the second half of the First Century AD, refers to the sphinx in terms which imply that it was visible, although he could not have seen it himself because, so far as is known, he did not visit Egypt. Nevertheless, his report is likely to be true because there is written evidence that the sphinx was cleared of sand in the time of Nero (AD 54-68). Other Roman emperors who have left proof of their recognition of the sphinx include Tiberius (AD 14-36) and Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180). Septimus Severus (AD 193-211) actually visited Giza and erected an altar in front of the sphinx.]

While it is impossible to calculate with any precision the proportion of its existence during which the sphinx was visible, what we know of the fate of other monuments in Egypt strongly suggests that its rehabilitation in pharaonic times would have been somewhat exceptional, though it may have occurred when the cult of the god Harmachis, of whom the sphinx was regarded as the embodiment, was flourishing in the neighbouring town, the Letopolite Busiris. [From the Fourth Century AD onwards it remained continuously buried; we learn from the traveller and physician Abdullatif (1162-1231) that, in his time, the head alone was visible. In 1818 the sand was cleared away by Captain Caviglia, but some twenty years later the artist David Roberts was able to depict no more than the head projecting from the sand.]

Although the sphinx was again restored to view in 1886 by Sir Gaston Maspero, it has only been kept regularly clear of accumulations of sand since 1925-26. For more than fifty years it has thus been subjected to erosion from wind-blown sand and the stone has undoubtedly suffered. The Egyptian authorities are well aware that something has to be done to prevent further deterioration, but it is difficult to see how the problem can be effectively resolved.

Our remarks were in a general editorial discussion on the return of cultural property, and elicited this interesting comment from Dr David Phillipson, Curator of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology:

May I say how glad I was to read your editorial on the return of cultural property. Perhaps the British Museum

is not always given its due: in the recent 'Treasures of Ancient Nigeria' exhibition at the Royal Academy, two splendid Benin plaques were displayed as loans from the National Museum, Lagos. Each still clearly showed its original British Museum registration number (and one of these numbers is, in fact, visible—and duly noted in the caption—in plate 85 of Ekpo Eyo and Frank Willett's *Treasures of Ancient Nigeria* to accompany the exhibition). So the sphinx's beard had a precedent. . . .

☞ We draw the attention of our readers to four books that have come our way recently, all of which have interesting archaeological sidelights. The first is Sheila, Viscountess Powerscourt's *Sun too fast*, first published by Geoffrey Bles in 1974. It was the second volume of her autobiographical essays: the first was *Real people* (London, The Cresset Press, 1952) and was written under the name which brought her fame as a poet, Sheila Wingfield; it had a characteristically amusing and honest preface by John Betjeman ending, 'This is a book which only a woman can write, but which a man can enjoy.' The Editor has enjoyed a great deal in these two books, not least the first essay in *Sun too fast* which is a delightful, sympathetic, percipient portrait of Margaret Murray.

Lady Powerscourt had once said to Ma Murray that she considered 'archaeology the bones, and folklore the blood of the past'. Dr Murray asked if she could use that phrase in her Presidential Address to the Folklore Society, and in that address also told the story of how a fieldworker making an anthropological survey of Wales was asked by a little child, 'Now what am I?' The reply was, 'I think you are a little woodland fairy': to which the child replied contemptuously, 'Oh I don't mean that; when Professor Fleure measured my granny, he said she was Mid-Mediterranean' (*Sun too fast*, 14).

☞ Evelyn Waugh's *Labels* has just been reissued in the Penguin Travel Library, price £2.50: it was first published in 1930 and recorded his views as he travelled about the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa. *The art of Ancient Egypt* excited him and he wrote (pp. 87–8 of the new edition):

There seem to me few things more boring than the cult of mere antiquity. I would view with the utmost equanimity the obliteration of all those cromlechs and barrows and fosses of our remote ancestors which litter the English countryside: whenever I see Gothic lettering on the ordnance survey map I set my steps in a contrary direction. I wish all the rectors who spend their days in

scratching up flint arrowheads and bits of pottery and horrible scraps of tessellated pavement would bury them again and go back to their prayers. But Egyptian antiquities are quite another matter. There is nothing here to evoke that patronising interest with which we arm ourselves in our surveys of ancient British remains. . . . How clever of Dr So-and-So to guess that that little splinter of bone in the glass case was not really a little splinter of bone but a Pictish needle—and how clever of the Picts all those years ago to think of making a needle out of a little splinter of bone. . . . There is nothing of that in our appreciation of Egyptian remains, particularly the incomparable collection recently unearthed in the tomb of Tutankhamen. Here we are in touch with a civilization of splendour and refinement, of very good sculpture, superb architecture, opulent and discreet ornament, and, so far as one can judge, of cultured and temperate social life.

An interesting passage: Evelyn Waugh was always deliciously opinionated and often disgracefully ignorant. Lancing and Oxford had not taken him to the Alfred Jewel in the Ashmolean or to the remarkable treasures of the pre-Roman barbarians in the British Museum, Saint Germain-en-Laye, and the Musée Borely: he thought, as many people do, of our pre-Roman ancestors as groove-and-splinter men, forgetting Lascaux, Gavrinis, and the Trawsfynydd tankard, human beings and artists described here (p. 146) by Stuart Piggott in a memorable phrase as 'stinking likeable witless intelligent incalculable real awful people'. We publish here one of the works of art of these stinking real awful people: the canister from Driffield (PL. XXI).

☞ The third book is Geoffrey Grigson's *Recollections; chiefly of writers and artists* (1984). Full of good things, it has one short piece (No. 20, pp. 115–19) entitled 'Reading *Antiquity*', which the publishers, Chatto & Windus, insist was never published before, but was, in fact, published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1978 and reproduced, in part, by us in *ANTIQUITY*, 1978, 179–80. It is well worth re-reading: Grigson's *Recollections* is price £12.50.

At the head of the essay Grigson prints these lines from Wyndham Lewis's poem:

*I should like to have you tell me why Browne's urn  
Makes all the past with firework colours burn.*

☞ The fourth book is Hugh Carey's *Mansfield Forbes and his Cambridge* (Cambridge University Press, 1984, £15.00) and, alas, the author died in

May 1984, just having passed the proofs for press. Manny Forbes, with H. M. Chadwick, E. M. Tillyard, and S. C. Roberts, was the founder of the English Tripes; but he was also a man of wide archaeological and architectural interests. The Editor remembers looking through the Lecture-List issue of the *Cambridge University Reporter* in 1933 and finding the advertisement of a course of lectures by M. W. Forbes entitled 'From Mediaeval to Modern; a study of poetry from Spenser to Wordsworth with special reference to Scottish baronial architecture'.

Chadwick said, 'Oh, you ought to go to his lectures. Manny's a great man.' We never did and the great man died in 1936. It is nice to know that his house in Queen's Road, Finella, is being restored to its original brilliant Raymond McGrath form.

Manny had very keen archaeological interests and worked with Gordon Childe at the excavations of the Stone Circle at Old Keig in the early thirties. Hugh Carey wrote (p. 134):

No doubt the Professor was more cautious than Manny in the conclusions which he reached about the circle—that the pillars surrounded a central cairn at which some barbaric Aberdeenshire chief had been ceremonially burned, the circle having been constructed during his lifetime; and that the pottery urns discovered alongside 'perhaps should be regarded rather as receptacles for food- and drink-offerings to the departed than as urns for his ashes'. Manny had too much imagination, too many wishful thoughts, to be an archaeologist, but the whole process and its camaraderie fascinated him.

In the field Manny and Childe were a splendid contrast: Childe was tall and rangy with a bulbous, bright red nose, bushy eyebrows, and a vast moustache, the whole surmounted with a very wide 'rive gauche' black hat; he wore black drain-pipe trousers liberally sprinkled with flowers of sulphur against harvest bugs, and smelt like an addled egg. Manny's slight figure was clad in a pair of skin-tight bright pink trousers; he said they would put the bugs off, and they very probably did. He confided to a friend, 'I feel like a Victoria plum about to be stung by a wasp.'

 We publish in this issue Christopher Chippindale's comments on the English Heritage plan for Stonehenge and a statement by Dr Wainwright and Professor Cunliffe on the forthcoming excavations at Maiden Castle. We warmly support the English Heritage plan (but wonder if it will happen) with one reservation: there must never be a full-scale reconstruction of Stonehenge built at Larkhill. There should be a full-scale replica, and while the

English Heritage boys have not ruled this out, they have not put it in their plan. This they should do. Tourists will not walk the distance from Larkhill to Stonehenge; they must have a Stonehenge B at Larkhill and it must be properly built of stone; we utterly deplore the name and the concept of a 'foamhenge'.

The recent discussions about the 1985–6 excavations at Maiden Castle brought us into fresh contact with our old friend Bill Wedlake, now 81. He writes:

It was in 1934 that I was asked to assist the then Dr Wheeler to excavate the stupendous earthwork, Maiden Castle. It was here that I spent four annual seasons examining the great work. It was a great experiment and I made many friends. In fact many of our post-war archaeologists found their 'sea-legs' at Maiden Castle. Many are the stories that I could tell. You will perhaps know that the greater part of the fortified hornwork of the eastern entrance with its fine walls and intervening postholes was excavated by me after the official end of the excavation, and I was left with the workmen to finish the task. Sir Mortimer used to pay weekend visits up to the end of the year. I also discovered the original entrance into the first Early Iron Age west end of the camp, and the ditch of the Long Mound.

It is good to know that Wedlake has written his autobiography and we look forward to its publication, as we do to those of Charles Phillips and Seton Lloyd. But what an astonishing list of archaeological octogenarians we now have! Congratulations to Kitty Richardson and Christopher Hawkes who recently joined this grand roster which includes, in addition to the five people we have mentioned, Estyn Evans, Raleigh Radford, Donald Harden, and Jocelyn Toynbee.

Miss Richardson took over the assistant directorship of the Maiden Castle excavations from Mollie Cotton, another of the bright young Wheeler girls of the fifties, who also survived into her eighties (*Antiquity*, 1984, 168–9). Both Miss Richardson and Mrs Cotton were much concerned with Wheeler's field researches and excavations in the hillforts of northern France.

Christopher Hawkes first published in *ANTIQUITY* in 1931—an account of the Colchester excavations and his famous hillforts paper. The opening words of his ABC paper still read compellingly over half a century later: 'The British hillfort in these days needs no introduction'; hillforts 'have caught the imagination in every age'.

Certainly the work of Hawkes, Wheeler, and

Cunliffe have caught the imagination of our age and made the past with firework colours burn.

As we go to press (in late April) we learn with sadness of the death of two of the great old ladies of British archaeology. Gertrude Caton Thompson died peacefully, in her 98th year, in Court Farm, Broadway, Worcestershire, the home of her dear friends Toty and Dorothy de Navarro, where they had all lived (until J. M. de Navarro's death in 1979) for the last three decades, since the de Navarros, those distinguished and dedicated teachers of so many generations of Cambridge Chadwickians, retired from academe.

We have already written about Dr Caton Thompson when reviewing her remarkable autobiography *Mixed memoirs* (*Antiquity*, 1984, 85–6). We quote words from *The Times* obituary (25 April 1985):

Dr Gertrude Caton Thompson, FBA, who died at her home in Worcestershire on April 18 at the age of 97, was an outstanding archaeologist who made a great contribution to the knowledge of African prehistory.

Daughter of a wealthy stockbroker, privately educated, she belonged to the generation of indomitable, indefatigable and committed travellers to the past of the ancient world of the Near East and Africa. A civil servant during the First World War, she became an archaeologist after it was over.

She began serious study of archaeology under Sir Flinders Petrie at University College London in 1921. She first excavated with him in Egypt at Abydos, but it was in 1924 at Qau with Petrie and Guy Brunton that she found the site of a Predynastic village at North Spur, Hemmamiya, which she excavated alone with consummate skill and later published in *The Badarian Civilization* (1928, with G. Brunton). The site still provides the best evidence for the sequence of the prehistoric cultures of Upper Egypt.

Gertrude Caton Thompson's personality was quiet, retiring and private; but in her pioneering field-work she was intrepid and absolutely indomitable, while her acute, methodical and incisive brain, which remained clear to the end, solved problems which others had not even formulated.

She never held a professional post in a museum or university, though it was credibly reported that she was offered, and declined, the Disney Chair of Archaeology in Cambridge in 1937. The University of Cambridge made her an Honorary Doctor, Newnham College an Honorary Fellow, and University College London a Fellow. She became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1944.

Her contribution to archaeology was outstanding; *The Times* obituary speaks of travellers to the past of the ancient world of the Near East and Africa: Freya Stark was another but Gertrude and Freya

shared no love for each other. Gertrude terrified many men who did not realize that her firmness and clear criticism, her sincerity and honesty masked a great kindness and sympathy. Her death is the end of an era of freelance archaeology.

Her autobiography, *Mixed memoirs*, will tell you much of her life and achievement, and what she thought of herself. It does not tell you what the world thought of her: this remarkable woman who, seated on a camel in the Sahara, surveyed the past and present of mankind, with sympathy, knowledge and understanding.

*Dr David Phillipson writes:* I was sad to learn of the death of Gertrude Caton Thompson. I suspect that, in the long term, she may be best remembered for her work at Great Zimbabwe. You may like to know of an affectionate gesture last year by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, who dedicated to Gertrude's honour the first issue of their re-founded journal *Zimbabwea*. The volume contains a bibliographic note by Roger Summers and a number of important papers on the archaeology of Zimbabwe and neighbouring areas by 'her much younger friends and colleagues' offered 'with gratitude, admiration and affection'. In his foreword, F. P. Matipano, Executive Director of the National Museums and Monuments, notes that the 'volume is offered to Miss G. Caton Thompson in grateful acknowledgement of her service to archaeology in Zimbabwe'.

Miss Olga Tufnell was a very junior friend of Gertrude Caton Thompson. She died on 11 April, after a short illness, in her 80th year. She was a pupil of Sir Flinders Petrie in the 1920s, and in 1932 moved on to the staff of another of Petrie's pupils, James Starkey: she had been appointed to take part in the Wellcome Marston excavations at Tell Duweir (Lachish) and, when Starkey was murdered in 1938, took over the site and, almost singlehanded, published over the next 20 years the results of those excavations in three large volumes, which have become classic studies of the Bronze and Early Iron Age in Palestine.

To quote the admirable obituary notice in *The Times* (22 April 1985), 'She was a dedicated scholar . . . lively and alert to the last. . . . Her modesty and integrity endeared her to everyone and made her the trusted friend of British, Arabs, and Israelis alike—a real link in public relations on an international plane.'

With the deaths of Gertrude and Olga have we said goodbye to the last archaeologists who worked with Sir Flinders Petrie, who was born one hundred and thirty-two years ago?