

Antiquity

A Quarterly Review of Archaeology

VOL. XII No. 45

MARCH 1938

Editorial Notes

THESE Notes should deal with live issues, with policies of action and with ideas that are current amongst workers in the field of archaeology. The review-policy of ANTIQUITY is, therefore, a suitable subject for open discussion here.

We sometimes wonder whether the publication of about 20 pages of reviews in each number is justified, whether some of the labour thus involved is not wasted. Recently we took part in a most fruitful weekend discussion on this very subject, and some interesting conclusions emerged.



It was agreed by all that the reader wanted to be told what the book was about, and whether it was a 'good' book. It was also agreed that, on the whole, it was better not to notice 'bad' books. Obviously, however, not all 'good' books can be reviewed, for, out of those received, some are severely technical—necessary to the specialist but unintelligible to others. Excavation reports do not as a rule come under this heading, for nearly all of them—and all the best—have some general bearing, and contain much that can be understood by any intelligent and well-informed person. As for 'bad' books, there are times when notice should be taken of them to protect the public against plausible charlatans; but more often the space thus occupied would be better filled by a notice of a 'good' book. As a rule the exposure of charlatans is best left to themselves, and time.

ANTIQUITY

Another interesting fact brought out by our discussion was that reviews, especially the best, often have a sterilizing effect. It is easy for a conscientious reviewer to embody in a review some idea or discovery of his own that should more properly be developed at greater length in the form of an article or book. To evade this is a temptation to a busy man ; for, by incorporating it briefly in a review, he patents his idea at the cost of the least trouble to himself. But if the idea is sound and really important, it deserves something better than to be thus prematurely born and forthwith, for all practical purposes, buried. Instances of this practice have been frequent in ANTIQUITY (the present writer is by no means guiltless). There may be cases where the practice is justified. Usually, however, a review should consist of information and criticism rather than of brilliant ideas.



Some change of policy is necessary if only on the grounds of space. Readers will have noticed that reviews are now printed in larger type. (In passing we may mention that this change was the direct result of a reader's criticism, for which we are duly grateful). But the pile of books awaiting attention grows steadily, and at the present rate prompt notice will become ever rarer, and many books will have to be consigned to the list of Books Received. (We take this opportunity of pointing out what must surely be obvious—that such brief mention is emphatically not in any way a condemnation. It simply means that, for one or other reason, the book in question cannot be reviewed in ANTIQUITY. Sometimes it is because the reviewer has failed to live up to his promise!).



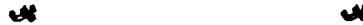
In future it is hoped to publish more 'block reviews' of several books that seem adapted for such treatment, rather in the style of other quarterlies (the *Quarterly Review*, for instance). The difficulty of carrying out this policy is, of course, to find someone to undertake the task. Experienced archaeologists are not too common in this country where the old book-learning still controls so many key-positions. In some spheres (such as that of Mesopotamia, for example) the number of potential reviewers, and even of writers of articles, is so small that each of them may receive several requests to review the same book. The labour of reviewing is considerable, and takes up time that should often be devoted to other work. Moreover, it is neither fair nor desirable (as a rule) that the same person should be expected to write several reviews of the same book.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Whether the change of policy here outlined will prove practicable is still uncertain. In any case it cannot come into effect at once, since there are still a number of reviews to work off. It will be our aim to produce this change, however, if we find it possible. Finally, we would ask those who are good enough to give us their help, to make their reviews as short as they can. The actual length must be left to reviewers themselves to decide ; and in so doing we would beg them *not* to look back (as some do) and find the *longest* review ever published, and then use it as a measure for their own, but rather to adopt a minimum length.



We referred above to the dearth of specialists in Middle Eastern archaeology. That is one of the causes of a weakness in the contents of *ANTIQUITY*. We are quite well aware that *ANTIQUITY* does not contain as much information as it should about the archaeology of the Middle East, but we hope that, if promises are fulfilled, several articles dealing with this part of the world will shortly appear. But in this country we are lamentably poor in workers in this field, and the dastardly and pointless murder of Mr Starkey has still further reduced their numbers. The consequence is that individuals are overworked, and it is not right to expect them to give to reviewing the time and energy that should go to research. (It would be interesting if figures could be compiled to compare the amount of money devoted to the endowment of field-work and research in, say, Palestine, Cyprus, Syria and Iraq by the different nations working there).



Amongst those workers are the inhabitants of the lands themselves. That is as it should be. Scientific archaeology was born in the North, and still maintains its lead there ; but science—true science—ignores national and racial frontiers, and the backward countries are waking up to the study of their own past. Egypt is beginning to produce its own archaeologists, one of whom will (we hope) shortly be introduced to our readers. Cypriote archaeology is at last being set in thorough order, thanks to the work of students of at least four different nationalities, and aided by the Government and by voluntary contributions. Much more might be done if more money were available, for the organization is all ready, and the workers are enthusiastic. The Nicosia Museum is served by a devoted staff. Its arrangement is admirable, and it needs only time and funds to become a model of its

ANTIQUITY

kind. The work of the late Sir Themistocles Zammit in Malta is well known and justly admired throughout the archaeological world.



In all these matters the relative functions of the home authorities (which in practice usually means the Treasury), the local Government and the voluntary contributor (whether an individual or a corporation) are not always equally balanced. If it be admitted that certain activities, such as excavation, are the particular function of individuals and societies, it must also be pointed out that others, such as the conservation of antiquities, in museums and out-of-doors, must be the prime duty of the Government. A certain minimum of such conservation is incumbent upon all civilized Governments. Yet there are still regions where those minimum requirements have not yet been fulfilled. For the moment we do not propose to say more on this subject, in the hope that certain developments may take place.



Our twelfth volume begins with this number and we venture to remind our subscribers of the renewal of their subscription. Already many have been good enough to send it, and the use of Bank Orders is adopted by others—to all these our thanks are given. To those who so far have not done either we would say that payment before we have to send out 'reminders' is very much appreciated and saves work in several ways. We shall be glad if they will find it convenient to make use of the form and envelope inserted in their December number.



In another way the help of our readers will be welcomed. We know that everywhere there must be potential subscribers who have not yet seen or even heard of ANTIQUITY (in spite of its world-wide circulation). We shall be glad to have the names and addresses (sent for convenience to 24 Parkend Road, Gloucester) of friends who they think would like to have particulars, which would be sent at once, and in special cases we are prepared to send a specimen copy.



Finally our thanks are once more expressed to all who enable ANTIQUITY to continue. We are much encouraged by the expressions of appreciation which show us that it is still received with unabated pleasure and interest.