

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

MODERN archaeology is primarily concerned with two main problems:—To construct a secure and rigid chronological framework, and to determine the extent and relationship of cultures. The former is itself a prime necessity, but it is also inextricably interwoven with the latter; and as soon as we begin to investigate the precise relation of one culture to another in a separate region, we are at once confronted with the fascinating mysteries of diffusion. Where were certain technical devices invented? How did they spread over the world? These mysteries deserve the closest scrutiny, for it is the business of science to dispel such (not to mystify). Furthermore, the same process of diffusion is still active and therefore of current interest.



It so happens that several articles in this number illustrate these principles and indeed advance our knowledge of the subjects dealt with. The author of the first article reviews the facts concerned with the origin of iron-working, and a Note (p. 87) touches on the remoter but kindred problem of the origin of metal-working, and suggests certain enquiries. Another article (pp. 25–36) illustrates the diffusion, from civilization to its barbaric fringe, of improved methods of building. The neolithic Rhineland village (pp. 89–93) is an example of primitive conditions, it is true; but, on the other hand, it must also be remembered that it was an *agricultural* community, and as such represented

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at that remote date a very great advance on anything previously known in the region, where hunting and collecting had hitherto prevailed. That advance was of course diffused from the land in the southeast where it originated.



The article on Roman Barrows illustrates, if the authors' contention is accepted, what may be called *diffusion by prestige*. In this instance it is the prestige of Roman culture which influences the burial-customs of native provincials. That is a familiar phenomenon, which occurs wherever what is called (by its protagonists) a 'higher', or more technically advanced and powerful, culture impinges upon a 'lower' and less advanced one. Examples of the diffusion of customs of western civilization amongst savage or barbaric peoples may be found in the courts of African chiefs and elsewhere. A minor example was observed by the writer in a modern Tunisian cave-dwelling, where the place of honour amongst wall-ornaments was assigned to certain cast-off trinkets of European origin—a pair of old opera-glasses, an empty picture-frame, an old Vichy bottle. These were displayed and treasured on account of their rarity-plus-prestige-value.



The diffusion of artistic and technical skill is well illustrated by the sculptured crosses of the Dark Ages. They are amongst the finest things of their kind ever produced ; they represent a new and original art-style ; and when we enquire closely into their origin and affinities we find that some of the designs were, as Dr Kitzinger's illustrations prove, obtained from the stock of contemporary patterns in circulation in the eastern Mediterranean ! But in taking over and using these patterns those real artists did not blindly copy them, after the manner of mass-producers and charlatans ; they converted them into their own style, just as Shakespeare converted and transmuted the raw plots of his predecessors.



In this connexion we may quote an interesting criticism of the article on 'Njoya and his script', printed in the last number (ix, 435-42) of ANTIQUITY. The critic considered that the Bamouna

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painting (plate facing p. 440) looked like a fake. 'The background is typical West Coast Mohammedan work, but the figure is evidently copied from some Asiatic source, possibly Persian. No African chief ever had a face like that, or that head-dress or raiment; but you can see them on British Museum post-cards of Persian work'. Agreed; but if this is a fake, then so are the panels of the four evangelists in the Lindisfarne gospels, which 'would seem to have been copied more or less directly' from earlier paintings executed in Italy, probably in the 6th century, and brought to England before 684 by Ceolfrid, Abbot of Jarrow (Gilson's facsimile edn., 1923, 1-3). The parallel is exact; the cultures compared are closely alike, and each borrowed from the repertory of another civilization. To the sophisticated Levantines of the 7th and 8th centuries, the Anglian princelings must have appeared as remote and devoid of significance as an African chieftain appears to some of us today. But the cultural and historical comparison is illuminating, and gives food for reflection.



Dr Kitzinger's article is an important by-product of the work now being carried out in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities of the British Museum. That Department deals with Anglo-Saxon sculpture amongst other things. Now it will be obvious to all who read the article that, for the study of this, a large collection of photographs is a basic need. A complete collection of photographs of every fragment of Anglo-Saxon sculpture is actually being formed, with a view to the eventual publication of a *corpus*; some preliminary studies are already in progress. We know that it would be of enormous help to the authorities if any readers who possess (or feel disposed to make) good photographs of crosses and pre-Conquest carvings would send prints to Mr T. D. Kendrick or Dr Ernst Kitzinger, at the British Museum. Such prints will be stamped with the name and address of the owner of the copyright. It would equally help if readers would indicate the existence and present location of any such sculptures as are unpublished and likely to be unknown to students. Crosses are naturally the chief monuments concerned, but nearly all English sculpture relating to the art of the crosses comes within the scope of the survey. On the other hand no attempt is being made systematically to collect illustrations of middle 12th century (or later) tympana, capitals or fonts.

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Students of ancient Africa are expectantly awaiting news and publication of the important excavations at Mapungubwe, in the Transvaal, near the Limpopo, conducted by Pretoria University, and referred to in our numbers for March 1934 (p. 103), March 1935 (p. 101) and Sept. 1935 (p. 358). The excavations have been under the direction of Mr Neville Jones and Mr J. F. Schofield, whose excellent work in the past on the Stone Age in Rhodesia, and the Zimbabwe ruins respectively, inspires complete confidence in their scientific handling and publication of this recent undertaking. It may confidently be expected to throw considerable light upon ancestral Bantu movements and cultures, and thereby indirectly to contribute fresh data to the Zimbabwe problem.

The SUBSCRIPTION to ANTIQUITY for 1936 is now DUE. We would remind our Subscribers of the form and envelope inserted in the December number for the purpose of remitting payments. *An early response will be much appreciated as this will save avoidable trouble in having to send out direct reminders.*

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