

THE FUTURE IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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THE war in Europe, which has involved most of the lands that served as habitations for the ancient Greeks as well as the territory comprised within the Roman Empire, has brought few benefits to mankind in general or to the learned world in particular. But upon the science—or, as some would have it, pseudo-science—of archaeology it has conferred the blessing of an enforced cessation from excavational activities.

Such a paradox may appear to come strangely from one who has been a student of Classical archaeology for more than a quarter of a century, and has occupied an academic chair in that field for upwards of half that period of time. But a little investigation of the less sensitive type of archaeological journal will reveal that a long moratorium in archaeological exploration has repeatedly been proposed—in several instances even by those who have distinguished themselves in field-work.

Truth to tell, we have been, in no small measure, swamped under the flood of material that has been recovered from mother earth within the present generation. Indeed, much of the long-exhibited, and consequently well-known, relics of antiquity is still intellectually undigested. What shall we say, then, of the storage-rooms of museums, near and far, small and great, that are filled to bursting with pottery, sculpture and non-artistic objects that have perhaps never yet emerged from their packing-cases? Give us time, O unwearied excavator! Give us time, that we may thereby catch up in the race.

The field-worker is the midwife who assists upon the occasion of the emergence from the matrix of earth of the handiwork of her earlier offspring. The wet-nurses are those who classify all this, and set it in its proper relation. The governess is brought into play when it is sought to make clear the application of the "artifacts" to the life of their several creators, regarded as groups rather than individually.

Each of these three classes boasts its own importance and superiority. It is rarely indeed that a single individual makes a notable advance in more than one of these categories. One ventures to think that it is the first class that could most readily be dispensed with, while archaeological research would still go on. In point of mass, it must be granted that probably twenty

times the material that has been discovered through systematic excavation in Classical lands has been found through accident or "unauthorized" digging. And the best finds are not always those that emanate from the excavation. Much of the summer of 1931 I spent at Athens observing the beginning of the great campaign in the Agora or market-place. The work was carried on at great expense, and with wholly satisfactory results. But the real Athenian discoveries of the year—a marble head which was a beautiful copy of the Athena Parthenos, and a sixth-century seated figure—came about by virtue of purely accidental digging.

I should be the last to make light of scientific investigation of sites, as opposed to the tomb-robbing and baksheesh-seeking methods of the peasants. The well-organized excavation is a delight to behold, and a still greater delight in which to take an active part. Its chief merits, as we view the results of the "dig", is the determination of a more or less definite "context"—the relation vertically and horizontally of one find to another, so that a clear system of chronology may be established between them. Unhappily, the complete attainment of this desideratum is impossible except in the completely undisturbed site, a phenomenon that does not exist.

Furthermore, the importance of the observation of archaeological contexts, except for little-known periods and cultures, may easily be exaggerated. If, e.g., we find, in what is presumed to be a mid fifth-century stratum in Greece, a coin, a vase and a statue, we establish their dates individually on the strength of our ascertained knowledge of style, not on any collective principle. In other words, as we deal with well-known periods of antiquity, we employ many criteria laboriously built up, and are no longer dependent on relativity of position among the artifacts. Even when we are handling architectural remains previously unknown, we are now by no means completely dependent, as we once were, on the evidence afforded by such materials as sherds and coins scattered amid or under the ruins.

A visit paid by a travelling student of archaeology to a modern site that is being excavated is usually an experience not entirely happy. He is welcome as long as his attitude towards the finds is disinterested and, one may almost say, uninterested. But as soon as he begins to manifest a certain degree of admiration for a special object, particularly if he seeks to obtain a photographic reproduction of it, he immediately becomes suspect. He begins to hear murmurs touching the matter of "publication rights", and if he is not fortunate enough speedily to make good

his case, the legal aspect of the situation may be mentioned. The material found is the "property" of the excavator, and must be considered as sacrosanct until that far-distant day when the "official publication" will ultimately be released. The unauthorized camera is taboo in the excavation-site; at some stations, the workmen, the diggers, have their orders to shout "Photography forbidden!" at any stranger who threatens to bring his photographic apparatus into play. Unluckily, the speed of the "candid" camera or the far-sightedness of the telescopic-lens often frustrates any action that may be contemplated.

Within the archaeological museum, these unhappy conditions differ from those current at the site in degree rather than in kind. The indiscriminate use of the camera is prohibited, but this is perhaps just as well for the public peace; otherwise, the serious student would constantly have to encounter the smiling group being photographed while clustered familiarly about the famous statue or other work of art. But in many institutions in this country and abroad one is obliged to pay, for a respectable print of any exhibit, from three to six times its actual value, or else he will have to content himself with one of the cheap, but often worthless, picture post-cards that are sold at the entrance. And if the picture is to be reproduced in an article or book, the scholar is usually saddled with the necessity—it is seldom left as a voluntary or optional act—of making "grateful acknowledgment" for the right of reproducing a monument that has been known, it may be, for generations, perhaps centuries.

The pettiness of this academic jealousy would be a thing ridiculous were it less pitiful. It commenced its unhallowed course some generations ago as a result of international rivalry; more recently it has painfully narrowed its sphere. It is sadly reminiscent of the attitude of the petulant child who advises his playmate: "You may look at my toys if you first promise not to touch them."

The publication of the material found in a given excavation is usually fraught with vexation to the waiting public. The learned journal receives a brief and, of necessity, inadequately illustrated account of the discoveries. There is often a preliminary publication, in book form, which suffers normally from a plethora of explanation and a minimum of pictured representation. The final publication is likely to be long delayed. It appears, after the lapse of several years, as a ponderous

tome, more likely a series of tomes, overloaded with obvious and unnecessary detail, and still lacking in anything approaching an adequate supply of illustrations. The Germans established the form and style in the nineteenth century, and we have followed, with complete and abject servility, in their footsteps ever since.

The expense of publication is not infrequently staggering. A few years ago, an eminent excavator published a number of hill-side tombs that he had excavated a good many years before. The type was abundantly known and elaborately published previously. The graves in question were those of commonplace middle-class folk whose chief ambition, in death as well as presumably in life, was the preservation of absolute uniformity. These abodes of the dead, alike in their shape and contents, conform to what we learn from the traditional auctioneer's whine: "When you see one, you see the lot." Yet custom ordained that the excavator should describe each of them with the same degree of care that one might devote to the portrayal of a *rara avis*. The work was a model of scholarly elucidation. All that was new in it could have been comprised in a ten-page article. It filled two heavy volumes; the price was \$45.

We need be little surprised that the cry is being raised that the cost of publishing the fruits of an excavation is to-day outrunning the expenses of the dig.

While the director of the excavation is, without exception, a man of approved scholarship and experience, the same cannot, unfortunately, be said of some of his assistants who are "in charge of" the pottery, sculpture, architecture, etc. that the excavation brings to light. Often they are university students; not infrequently they bear not even the burden of an academic degree. They may or may not have mastered their Buschor and Hereford for pottery; their Gardner and Lawrence for sculpture; their Anderson and Spiers and their Robertson for architecture. But usually their knowledge leaves something to be desired in the way of profundity—a lack that they are under the necessity of masking beneath a cloak of obvious detail and the citation of many authorities, often irrelevantly. We have before us the case of the American student, "in charge of" the coins of an important excavation, who was so puzzled over the identification of a specimen of the well-known Egyptian billion series that she was obliged to submit the problem to the authorities of the British Museum. Of this type of coin the Royal Ontario Museum at Toronto possesses no fewer than 18,000 examples. Dattari, the dealer, melted down some tons of the same so as to enhance the market price.

It is little wonder then that many are thankful, and profoundly so, that the war has brought all this to an end in so far as Classical sites at least are concerned. Not only has the flow of material ceased, but we have reached a season of stock-taking, and find that it is not unlikely that the archaeological method may be very considerably improved in the years that will follow the war.

To return to our earlier figure of language: we could dispense—at a pinch—with the services of our midwife; to eliminate the nurse and governess would be to abandon the science wholly. In the estimation of *hoi polloi*, archaeology is nothing but a succession of exciting discoveries, and too often the young student is attracted to it through this undeniably thrilling and romantic aspect of the study, only to become sold and indifferent when the stimulus is ultimately withdrawn. Within the past month I have heard of a young lady who had until recently been engaged in excavation in Greece, now grieving like Achilles in his hut and refusing to be comforted. Seemingly the spade is mightier than the pen!

In the New Europe—perhaps the New World—which, we confidently hope, lies not too far in the offing, a Europe swayed and dominated not by the reactionary orientalism of Germany and Italy, a parasitic and exotic growth that can take no permanent root in western civilization, but rather by Anglo-Saxon liberalism, we shall see much of this changed. Knowledge will come to be regarded as a thing not to be hoarded or hidden under a bushel, but placed on a candlestick for the enlightenment of the world. The field-archaeologist, deeming the making of the discovery to be in itself a sufficient reward, will release it immediately for the edification of universal scholarship.

How will the chief amelioration of present conditions be accomplished? Obviously, the greatest obstacle that to-day lies in the road of archaeological research is inadequacy of illustration. We possess hundreds of thousands of relics of the ancient world, a majority of which have never been seen in half-tone or photogravure. No great university library is complete in those already published and, as we have noted, the archaeological publication is notoriously expensive.

But photography *will* solve the scholar's problem—and that, too, cheaply and adequately. We are gradually awakening to the possibilities that are inherent in the micro-film. Already it is providing, at amazingly low expense, useful reproductions of rare books and of learned articles that are not, to the ordinary

scholar, easy of access. For archaeological purposes we shall employ, of course, the colour-film, the 35mm. variety.

We shall photograph every individual object that antiquity has yielded. Along with each statue, coin, vase, architectural member, seal, figurine, etc., will be photographed a centimetre-stick to provide an immediate and accurate scale; also a number preceded by initial letters of identification. Thus, C., T., R.O.M.A., s.369, appearing in the corner of the film, would indicate that the picture represented a certain statue in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto, Can. For every museum will be expected to furnish coloured films of every work that it contains. Private collections must needs follow suit. Excavation directors will, of course, disseminate films of this sort as rapidly as discoveries are made. The detailed, wearisome description will be relegated to the limbo of the past. He who runneth and hath eyes to see may now observe for himself.

The collection of films will thus serve as a universal *corpus* of the productions of antiquity, brought up to date monthly or perhaps weekly. In view of the anticipated cheapening of process, we may surmise that the individual picture will cost something under a cent. Hence, the scholar of moderate means will be enabled to store in a corner of his study more illustrations, and better ones, than a large library can to-day provide for a vast expenditure of outlay. With his projector and screen he will be able, with nearly the rapidity of thought, to produce before him, magically as it were, any object which he desires to inspect. It will be at all points like unto the original—with the proper adjustment of distance, made easy through the presence of the centimetre-stick, even as to dimensions.

With this provision for the service of the individual scholar, the old-fashioned, detail-by-detail publication, which was rendered essential less from the vanity of its author than through inadequate illustration, will disappear. The expensive practice of embellishing archaeological works with half-tones will end—so far at least as the highly specialized treatise is concerned. For each archaeologist will possess his own fund of illustrations purchased, we hope, at the rate of 10,000 for every \$100 of outlay. This will be, in addition to other benefits, a considerable saving of time and energy. The pursuit of illustrations through perhaps a score of volumes is not only time-devouring but wearying to the nervous system.

Under the circumstances arising from these new conditions, we may confidently expect that archaeological research will be made to flourish and abound.