

# ANTIQUARY AND ARCHAEOLOGIST

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WHEN the word "antiquary", which nowadays has become something rusty and bordering on the obsolete, is uttered in the hearing of any normal, well-informed individual of the English speaking world, he is inevitably reminded of the great novel of that name which was written by Sir Walter Scott in the course of a sustained literary effort that lasted but four months. This was in 1816, when Scott had reached the age of 45 and was at the height of his intellectual powers. Though *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* have sometimes been rated higher by the critics, *The Antiquary* was, according to Lockhart, Scott's favourite among his own works.

The portrait of Jonathan Oldbuck appears to have been derived from the contemporary antiquary, George Constable, together with some touches drawn from the career of John Ramsay of Ochtertyre. But Scott wielded the brush so well because he was painting, in large measure, his own picture, a likeness that was in very truth that of one of the finest antiquarian minds of his age. For him all aspects of the long-vanished world bore a tremendous appeal. His novels and his poems everywhere reflect the age of long ago, and *The Antiquary*, whose scene is laid in the days of Scott's youth, is everywhere shot with kaleidoscopic flashes of more remote times, even to the period of the shadowy Picts, of whose language but a single word had survived. We are rather better off in this respect to-day.

With the personal qualities of Mr. Oldbuck—his merits and his weaknesses, his morals and his religion, his hopes and his fears—we are not here concerned. All this belongs purely to the realm of imaginative fiction. But if we aspire to analyze the mind of a typical antiquary of a century and a half ago, we must needs enquire into his academic views and his attitude towards learning in general.

To Mr. Oldbuck and his colleagues the present is useful only in so far as it supplies a *pou sto* for the exhumation of the past, and that past comes near to having its roots fixed in infinity. All earlier cultures, so far as the human intellect is capable of comprehending them; all phases of recorded history; all activities of the human race throughout the vast expanse of time and in all quarters of the inhabited globe—the whole furnishes grist for the antiquarian

mill. On the other hand, a strong wall of division stands between the antiquary and the sciolist. The latter seeks to apprehend universal knowledge; the former loses interest once he has passed beyond the limit of human experience. *Humani nihil a me alienum puto* is the antiquary's guiding motto in his intellectual enterprises, and so with unflagging industry he strives to read the pages of the long-closed book of time wherever the name of man is recorded. With contemporary man and his works he has, as we have seen, but little to do. To the antiquary the past is tangible; the present is evanescent.

But the very nimety of his enterprise tends to thwart the progress of the antiquary. Pursuing as he does so many diverse paths, it is little wonder that he fails to make appreciable advance in any one of them. But in this respect he is merely the child of his age, and by no means stands alone among the intellectuals of the eighteenth century. The scholastic interests of the twentieth century scholar are concentrated at the centre, as it were, of a whirlpool of knowledge. Here the processes are narrow and correspondingly deep. Further out from the vortical centre come closely related fields of study in broader and shallower rings, while at the margin of the whole are found no more than fitful ripples of intellectual interest. But in the eighteenth century, such a type of academic specialization was unheard of and unborn.

An unfortunate characteristic of the antiquary—and with Mr. Oldbuck may be numbered many another—was his inordinate zeal for theorizing. No one can well deny that a necessary concomitant of scientific progress is a reasonable amount of hypothesis. But the modern scholar is willing to abandon his theory as soon as troublesome facts begin to poke holes in it. When the antiquary, on the other hand, had once promulgated his belief in a particular dogma, custom demanded that he should be prepared to defend it to the death—if not on horse or on foot, certainly with noisy tongue and busily scratching stilus. He thus abandons the rôle of investigator to assume the rôle of pleader. That such a procedure was quite subversive of the increase of knowledge goes without saying; and it must often have evoked from the more humble seeker after truth the prayer of the terrified negro who, far out in the woods at night in a thunderstorm, prayed: "O Lord, can't we have a little less noise and a little more light?" The belligerency of rival antiquaries naturally enough gave birth to a swarm of controversial tracts and monographs that have subsequently proved edifying to few apart from their own admiring parents. It is a melancholy fact that, even in this present age of grace, our learned journals do not entirely lack the same futile diatribe and polemic.

Moreover, Mr. Oldbuck and his *confrères* are inclined to be credulous in whatever involves the past, and often search for tokens of antiquity where none exist. He purchases from a packman a worthless bodle under the belief that it is an ancient numismatic treasure. In his confidence that he has discovered the *castra* of Agricola near the Mons Graupius on a neighbour's property, he gladly exchanges, on equal terms, tillage whose value is more than 50 s. an acre for barren moorland that would be dear at a pound Scots (1s. 8d.). His equanimity is shaken but not completely upset when the discovery is made that the *vallum* of the supposed camp is nothing more ancient than some dilapidated dykes, while the *praetorium* is identified as the ruins of a temporary shelter erected by a party of rustics only twenty years before. Mr. Oldbuck had begun his excavating by running what we should now call trial-trenches through the site, and on the third day of the operations the workmen had unearthed an inscribed stone bearing a figure in intaglio which the antiquary had readily interpreted as a sacrificial vessel, while the subscribed letters A.D.L.L. seemed to mean *Agricola dicavit libens lubens*. To support this interpretation there was the precedent of the Dutch antiquaries who claimed Caligula as the founder of one of their light-houses on the strength of the inscribed letters C.C.P.F., which could mean only *C. Caligula pharum fecit*. But presently it was revealed that the incised vessel was merely the attempt of a stone-mason at representing a soup-ladle, while the letters A.D.L.L. were but the initials of the word "Aiken Drum's Lang Ladle", inscribed in commemoration of the fondness of the said Mr. Drum for a well-filled ladle of broth!

It was the same spirit of credulity that impelled a later generation of antiquaries, the Pickwickians, to compile learned disquisitions on the subject of the precise meaning and age of the inscription that less learned folk had little difficulty in reading as "Bill Stumps, His Mark". It was the same believing and trusting spirit that led the Jack Harkaway savant, Mr. Mole, to find a Norse runic inscription in the poorly spaced but altogether prosaic *Drun Kasaf Ool*. Nowadays, in academic circles, we seem to be following too much in the footsteps of our own stiff-necked and rebellious generation, which abounds in skepticism and unbelief from its very cradle.

It may well be that it was this combination of credulity and belligerency which rendered the antiquary an object of ridicule with *hoi polloi*. The attitude of the man in the street is admirably mirrored in the words of Mr. Oldbuck's spirited nephew, Hector McIntyre:

He is an excellent old gentleman, . . . but then his eternal harangues upon topics not worth the spark of a flint—his investigations about invalidated pots and pans and tobacco-stoppers past service—all these things put me out of patience.

Such misunderstandings of even the high calling of the modern archaeologist are by no means uncommon, nor are they confined to the humbler and less well-informed circles of humanity. A distinguished Canadian Latinist used to refer to archaeology as the science of decrepit pots; a famous Greek scholar of Chicago has been known to describe the metamorphosis of the philologist into the archaeologist as "the process by which a man takes leave of his brains and substitutes his legs." When such are the views of the intellectually great and mighty, we may forgive the modern Greek peasant of the island of Lesbos who was recently heard to describe an archaeologist as "a man who steals old things and sells them".

But for all his faults—and they are many as viewed by the scientific mind of the twentieth century—the Antiquary of Scott and very likely the antiquary at large possessed one great, and in large measure redeeming, merit. The nature of this feature as it was revealed in the case of Mr. Oldbuck is well expressed by that rival antiquary, Sir Arthur Wardour, a man of vastly inferior mind: "You may observe that he never has any advantage of me in dispute, unless when he avails himself of a sort of pettifogging intimacy with dates, names, and trifling matters of fact—a tiresome and frivolous accuracy of memory, which is entirely owing to his mechanical descent". One may with profit express here the wish that we were all in possession of an equally pettifogging intimacy with and frivolous accuracy in matters pertaining to the past. For the Antiquary appears to have manifested a true historical sense, without which, I venture to think, no intellect may be regarded as genuinely great.

We may now take leave of this extraordinary figure whose characteristics Sir Walter Scott has limned with so much vividness and charm, in order that we may observe, for a moment, the antiquary in session. In spite of his strong leanings towards individualism, it is not impossible for him, on occasion, to become gregarious or a member of an organized group. The world's first association of antiquaries was formed in England in the year 1707, and from this embryo developed the great *Society of Antiquaries* which was formally constituted in 1717 and received a royal charter in 1751. Scotland, with her characteristic affection for ancient lore, was not far behind, her Society being founded in 1780. France and America

both fell into line some thirty years later. But Germany, for all her notable prestige in matters intellectual, proved the laggard among the leading nations, holding aloof from the formal marshaling of her antiquarian forces till the year 1852.

Nor must we leave unnoticed the activities of the illustrious *Society of Dilettanti* founded in England in 1733. The field of the Dilettanti was more straightened and accordingly more intensively cultivated than that which was tilled by the antiquaries. From the point of view of the Classical archaeologist, it is greatly to their credit that they were inspired, more than once in the last half of the eighteenth century, to send Chandler, Revett, and other experts to Greece and Asia Minor, where they examined and even dug (we should hesitate to use the word excavated) on the sites of Olympia, Ephesus, Miletus, Sardis, and other renowned cities of the ancient world. Of particular value are the careful drawings and sketches that their architects made of ancient temples, not a few of which were subsequently demolished. But our gratitude is tempered, notwithstanding, with a feeling of pained surprise as we reflect upon that occasion, early in the past century, when the Dilettanti scornfully rejected as worthless trash those priceless treasures of Athenian art, the Elgin marbles.

But even as, at an earlier date, the alchemist had given birth to the chemist and then passed from the earthly scene, so fate decrees that the antiquary shall pass away and be no more. His genuine offspring is the archaeologist, or rather, the antiquary is the parent of a single-celled organism that presently divides and subdivides in accordance with the established biological principles of cleavage. The early archaeologist, whose field, like that of the disciples, is the world, is followed in regular progression by an ever increasing line of successors. Thus we have the Classical archaeologist—who soon subdivides into the Greek archaeologist and the Roman archaeologist—the Egyptian, the Mesopotamian, the Persian, the Indian, the North American, the Central American, and many others. Indeed, it may be said with truth that there is to-day no considerable portion of the earth's inhabited, or formerly inhabited, surface that does not boast a group of archaeologists peculiarly its own. And each of these groups is cleft into smaller groups in a fashion that will presently be explained.

But there is a dark side to all this—a bar sinister, that beclouds the posterity of the antiquary. He has left behind him a spurious offspring as well, a *proles informis*, an unhallowed brood, veritable messengers of Satan to buffet their wholly respectable brothers. These are they who, in the guise of interested tourists, beset archae-

ological excavations and not only torment the technical experts with their ill-timed and usually empty-headed questions, but frequently attempt to make off with excavated objects that they desire as souvenirs. These are they who beset the directors and curators of public museums urging them to accept, sometimes actually to purchase, objects that are popularly known as curios, much sought after by the foolish and the unlearned. To the museum they are worse than useless. They take up valuable space on the shelves, while they cannot possibly be incorporated within the systematically arranged series that are the pride of the modern collection. These are they who offer for examination to the specialist in numismatics or ceramics a genuinely antique but common and nearly worthless coin or pot, and are offended and become filled with suspicion when he rates it at the value of a few cents. These are they who pester Classical archaeologists with questions relating to Mayan art; the Egyptologist with queries concerning the Incas; the specialist in Central American prehistory with enquiries on the subject of Sumerian ziggurats. Like their long-deceased forbears, they are unaware that such a thing as specialization exists. To them an archaeologist is an archaeologist and he is nothing more. Finally, these are they who confound the archaeologist with the grave-robber or the ditch-digger, and regard one's measure of success in archaeological research as likely to bear a direct relation to his physical strength and powers of endurance. I once overheard the president of a great university asking a distinguished excavator, in all solemnity, what proportion of the digging he did himself!

With the passing of the present age, which is undoubtedly the most blatantly vulgar since the time of the French Revolution, an age in which the barbarian has very nearly gained the upper hand, let us hope that this pestiferous element in humanity will likewise disappear!

The question naturally arises—in what decade or generation does the Old Year of the antiquary give place to the New Year of the archaeologist? Our German friends would have us believe that the change came about in the days of Winckelmann and Lessing, that is to say, in the sixties of the eighteenth century. While no one can well deny that these extraordinary men exerted the greatest influence imaginable on the current of art-criticism—particularly that of ancient art—it requires an unusual flight of the imagination to enable one to credit either of them with the paternity of the art or the science of archaeology as we nowadays understand these terms.

Although it is a grave error—albeit one often made—to confound archaeology with scientific excavation, there is no denying that there were serious limitations imposed on archaeology so long as the processes of excavation remained haphazard and fortuitous. The seventies of the nineteenth century saw the first attempts to uncover extended areas of ancient habitation. Earlier efforts had been confined to the unearthing of individual buildings, notably temples; the somewhat ruthless robbing—the word is hardly too strong—of ancient tombs; and the search for statuary and minor works of art. But in the seventies there develops a new theory the credit for which must be given to German scholars. Its chief tenet is one that still prevails; no excavation ought ever to be attempted where the programme does not include either the complete unearthing of a wide area or else the systematic examination of superimposed strata down to the level of “hard pan” or soil undisturbed by man. It was in the seventies that this theory was first applied to the momentous excavations conducted on the sites of Hissarlik, Samothrace, Delos, Olympia, Pergamon, and in various regions of Athens. To the seventies likewise belongs the founding of the German Archaeological Institute, the Archaeological Institute of America, the English Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, and the French School at Rome.

From these considerations, it appears to be a logical conclusion that the Winckelmann-Lessing belief to which we have alluded anticipates the truth by a full century, and that the period of the birth of archaeological science is within the memory of men now living.

What is archaeology? Definitions of the word have been formulated times without number since the days of Sir Charles Newton, whose *floruit* may be placed in the fifties of last century. He was among the first who attempted to explain the term, which to him signified “the scientific study of the human past, with three-fold subject matter—oral, written and monumental”. But Sir Charles, though he enjoys the distinction of having excavated at Halicarnassus and Cnidus, was more of an antiquary than an archaeologist; and we should to-day view with something akin to terror the carrying out of a programme of such formidable dimensions as he offers. Let us content ourselves with suggesting a more modest conception of archaeology, defining it as a scientifically organized essay to restore and rehabilitate—mentally, of course—the various cultures of the ancient world, through the study of its material remains—with or without the assistance, as circumstances may dictate, of written records.

In the great sphere of archaeological research (and here we may confine ourselves purely to Classical archaeology), one may readily discern many types of archaeologist each pondering over his own particular problem. Yet, if we set ourselves the task of arranging them in categories, we may have little or no trouble in distinguishing four general classes which participate in archaeological research. Each of these classes is distinguishable from its fellow by the community of its interests.

To the first belongs the excavating or field archaeologist, the man who looms particularly large in the popular eye. He is the pioneer, the discoverer who, to the man in the street, appears in the light of Moses at Meribah-Kadesh. For even as the patriarch smote the rock with his rod, and forthwith there gushed out streams of water, so the field archaeologist is supposed to strike his magic spade into the earth and there pours forth a flood of treasures including gold, silver, and precious stones. The layman forgets the concomitant wood, hay, stubble and other relatively worthless materials that are also encountered, and that too in infinitely greater measure than the first.

Excavations are conducted in accordance with the idealized theory that everything removed from the earth may, if necessary, be restored to its original position, vertically as well as laterally considered. There is thus more pure drudgery in this than in any other form of archaeological enquiry. The excavator, it is true, does not himself wield spade, pickaxe, or mattock; his workmen attend to all that; his foreman directs the workmen; his surveyor establishes his datum-level and determines the precise position of all objects discovered; his trained assistants account for the execution of many details. But the excavator must, like Pathé, see all, know all. As a recent writer has expressed it with regard to the conduct of an excavation: "The results may be spectacular; but the process itself will be wholly uninteresting to the spectator at large, who sees only a man with a steel tape or a folding metre-stick clambering around, squinting and measuring and writing endless figures to adorn little sketches of broken building-blocks".

From diametrically opposed points of view, excavation is the least and again the most important factor in archaeological research. A peasant or a navy could undoubtedly obtain the same tangible results as the scholar who has devoted many years to the study of the art. That is, each would probably be equally successful in digging up the site and unearthing the remnants of antiquity that are concealed therein. But it is hardly necessary to enlarge on the extent of the gulf that would divide the two on a final analysis.



On the one hand we should have a hotch potch, an omnium gatherum, an olla podrida, into which no adequate system could ever be brought; on the other, a beautifully arranged series of artifacts, capable of revealing, mute as they are, much of the cultural history of those who were their makers.

The second class of archaeologist comprises the various specialists in the fields of architecture, ceramics, sculpture—including statuettes and terracottas—coins and gems, paintings and mosaics, jewellery and small metal objects in general. To these may be added the epigraphists, though not a few are wont to classify them among philologists proper. The duty of each of these scholars is that of conducting minute and laborious investigations in his chosen field, and it is seldom indeed that a specialist in one department of archaeological research rises to heights of eminence in any other. With the exception of the architect, whose studies, from the very nature of the case, must be conducted in the open, these specialists have for their laboratories the museums of the world, while their interest in field-work is, as a rule, of secondary import. Very often the published reports of the coins, pottery, inscriptions, sculptures, etc. found in excavations are from the pen of relatively inexperienced and obscure men. We may therefore assert that it is quite possible—difficult as it is for the layman to understand—for one to be a first-rate archaeologist without his ever having assisted even in the active work of excavation. Indeed, it becomes patent, in the light of our definition of archaeology, that this second class of archaeologist renders more valuable service to the science than does the first. The field archaeologist discovers the *disjecta membra* of antiquity; the museum expert assembles them into something like decent order, and thus reveals their significance.

The third class of archaeologist is concerned with the institutions and the antiquities—in a less material sense—of the ancient world. He is interested in its fads and foibles, its superstitions, its food and drink, its clothes and shoes and hats, its games and pastimes. If ancient literature had anything to say of such matters, it has very largely disappeared, but perhaps these subjects seldom won the attention of the *littérateur*. So, the modern scholar who does not deem them unworthy of his notice is obliged to betake himself to his archaeological materials for enlightenment—to his vase-paintings, his relief-sculpture, his terracottas and bronzes. He undoubtedly will find it useful, in the course of his researches, to visit the museum so as to obtain thoroughly accurate information. But even this exertion he is largely spared owing to the

vast supplies of published material now available. His workshop is the university library or his own study.

And finally we have the archaeologist-historian, the scholar whose field of enquiry is history, but who is capable of utilizing archaeology as the handmaiden of the muse Clio. I do not refer to the man who uses inscriptions merely to brighten the highlights of his historical picture. I mean, rather, the historian who labours at his task with the material remains of antiquity constantly before his mind's eye; the historian who refuses to be restrained by the bonds imposed by some dull annalist or some prejudiced chronicler, and who realizes that much of a nation's best history is embalmed in her material remains. Nowhere is one able to observe more clearly the triumph of the human intellect over seemingly insurmountable difficulties than in the work of the prehistorian who, without the aid of a particle of literary assistance, causes "the dead bones to live again, the silent tongue to speak, and that right eloquently".

It is hardly necessary to observe that, with the classes that we have sought to distinguish, there is much overlapping and no perfectly clear line of distinction. It is possible for an individual to belong to two classes, or perhaps three. There are living in the world to-day perhaps a dozen men who might claim distinction, and rightly, in all four.

It is not the duty of anyone to write an *apologia* for the science of archaeology, unless he should deem it incumbent on him to defend the pursuance of every single branch of knowledge. The respectable niche that archaeology has for at least a generation occupied in the academic hall will not, one feels, soon be emptied. Its resources are as rich and inexhaustible as are those of any science or pseudo-science that has to do with human experience and human achievement; while the fascination that the element of pure and often unexpected discovery has for the mind of man, and the joy that results from the successful piecing together of the curious puzzles of antiquity, would seem to ensure the continuance of archaeological pursuits, so far as one may surmise, even to the end of time. When men cease to be curious regarding the former experiences of their race, and when the dead past is left the melancholy duty of burying its dead, then we may read in the stars the unmistakable message that the human drama is nearing its close; that the end of all things is at hand; and that the earth is beginning her final revolution towards the realm of eternal night.