

Antiquity

A Quarterly Review of Archaeology

VOL. IV No. 14

JUNE 1930

Editorial Notes

GOVERNMENTS do not often make generous grants of money in aid of archaeological research. Such grants as are made, however, are usually criticized for their meanness rather than for their extravagance. The South African Government has recently distinguished itself by making a grant of no less than £5000 to Dr Frobenius, who has been touring in South Africa with a large staff copying wall-paintings and endeavouring to solve the age and origin of the Rhodesian ruins. We do not know the exact conditions of the grant or what return the Government stipulated for; we only know that the grant has been made, or authorized. For the rest our knowledge is derived from press-cuttings of South African papers and from private correspondence with persons acquainted with the facts.



When we received the first press-cutting (from an American newspaper) we were incredulous. We recalled that Dr Frobenius had refused to accept the facts revealed by the British Association's excavations at Zimbabwe, both those of a quarter of a century ago (carried out by Dr Randall MacIver) and those of last year described by Miss Caton-Thompson in *ANTIQUITY*, December 1929. Both excavations were conducted most carefully and scientifically; the results of both were in agreement, and were the outcome of a number of observed facts capable of only a single interpretation—the recent age of the ruins. The wild suggestions put forward by irresponsible and unscientific theorizers had been put out of court and the question of the age of Zimbabwe could be no longer regarded as an open one.

Those who refused to face these facts could no longer be taken

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seriously. For these reasons we hesitated to believe what the papers said and took steps to find out more. To our great surprise we found that report was correct.

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Apparently this new 'Maecenas' (as the *Cape Argus* calls him in an excellent and witty leader of 25 February) is the Minister of the Interior, Dr Malan, to whom the good professor appears in the light of a 'sort of new Columbus', opening up a 'new world that we did not realize existed before'! The Minister has only himself to blame for his ignorance of South Africa's archaeological treasures. The rock-paintings were published in book form (*Bushman Paintings*) as long ago as 1909 by Miss Helen Tongue, and facsimile reproductions are also exhibited in the Cape Town museum.

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The Editor of the *Cape Argus* is wholly justified in his 'uncomfortable feeling that Dr Malan has made himself and his colleagues in the Government more than a little ridiculous by throwing away his maxim of "South Africa first" in order to shower benefits on a foreign adventurer . . . Let us hope that when next he contemplates posturing as the Maecenas of archaeology he will resist the blandishments of peregrinating professors, or at least take independent advice from someone with a little knowledge and common sense'. We regard the grant as not only an insult to the archaeologists of Great Britain and South Africa, but also as a scandalous waste of public money. We only hope that it will not prejudice public opinion against further Government support for archaeology such as, if properly applied, would yield a rich harvest.

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There is one aspect of the Zimbabwe ruins that never ceases to amaze us; namely, the fact that popular interest in the site should be lessened, or even cease altogether, if they are proved to be of native origin! We suppose that it is to be accounted for on the *omne ignotum pro mirabile* principle. Surely the ruins should be infinitely more interesting if it is proved—as it may well be—that they are a 'home product'? Surely this is more to be proud of than the remains of imaginary Semitic adventurers! From a strictly scientific point of view there can be no doubt whatever that Zimbabwe becomes *more* rather than *less* interesting, if it can be connected with other sites on the continent of Africa.

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We are writing these notes in the middle of a spell of field-work. Readers of *ANTIQUITY* will hardly need to be told what field-work is, nor are we sure that we could tell them briefly if they asked us. We mention the fact merely to ventilate a need we have long felt—that of a catalogue of old manuscript maps and estate plans. Such maps exist in fairly large numbers in every county. Usually they are kept at the Estate Offices of large country houses, or, when such exist, in muniment rooms. They may be of any scale or age; a common scale is about 1 : 3000, and maps of an earlier date than 1600 are by no means common. For the field archaeologist they are absolutely invaluable. (So far as we are aware only one attempt has been made to catalogue such old maps). We do not know whether such documents come within the province of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts; if not, we wish that some society or some private individual would calendar just those in a single county.



At the moment we feel the need of some such catalogue for Oxfordshire. Many of our problems would be solved by ancient field-names, and by pre-enclosure maps; and the county is rich in old estates. But to hunt through all the Estate Offices one's self is an impossible task. The individual points that such maps determine are not, taken singly, of first-rate importance, though there are many exceptions. But field-work is essentially a mosaic whose pattern only becomes visible as the individual tesserae are restored to their right places. A beginning might well be made with the maps possessed by the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. The task is a suitable one for post-graduate research and would be of more practical use than some theses, both to compiler and reader. We feel sure, moreover, that the authorities would willingly grant the necessary facilities.



The threatened quarrying for stone near Hadrian's Wall demands National action, and as we go to press we are glad to note that the matter is receiving Government attention. The proposals are not quite clear and until they are known exactly it is unwise to express views. Meanwhile public opinion has been aroused and we are content to await results.

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Colonel Lindbergh's flight over British Honduras, the Peten region of Guatemala, and Yucatan, accompanied by two eminent field archaeologists, Drs Ricketson and Kidder, was an extremely interesting experiment.* It was hoped that aerial survey might prove of assistance to archaeological explorers in the Ancient Maya region, by determining the position of undiscovered ruins. The result is tantalizing. Certain, apparently new, sites were observed in the densely forested area, but it is quite clear that the observers were severely handicapped by the fact that they were flying over a country which is, for the most part, unmapped. It is significant that, in several cases, certain geographical features are quoted as 'probably' this or that point. Information that a ruin has been discovered by air near a 'probable' fixed point is not of assistance to an archaeological expedition which has to work its way thither on foot. In dense bush it is perfectly possible to pass an important complex of ruins within a hundred yards and see no trace of pyramids or buildings.



Under present conditions the position appears to be this:— An air-survey, over densely forested country, may reveal the existence of important archaeological sites, built on such a scale that their larger structures overtop the forest. But it cannot provide the accurate location which the party charged with the duty of developing the site, travelling on the ground, requires. The ground-party is necessary, because the aeroplane cannot land until a clearing is made. Once a landing place has been made, any excavation party would find its work facilitated to an almost magical degree, owing to the constant and rapid communication which it could maintain between camp and civilization. New Guinea furnishes an example; there the journey to the gold-fields can now be accomplished in forty-five minutes from the coast, whereas, by land, it takes about eight days.

It is obvious that air-transport and air-survey will provide and is providing enormous assistance to archaeological investigation in certain areas. But the flight under discussion, though interesting as an experiment, tends to show that a densely-forested and imperfectly mapped country must still rely on the earth-crawling party for its archaeological exploitation.

* The results are published in the *American Geographical Review*, whose Editor has kindly supplied us with an advance copy.