

Notes and News

HOW TO USE OLD MAPS

The following notes are written down at the suggestion of a colleague to whom I had been telling my recent experiences. To my objection that fault-finding was rather thankless business and apt to lead to controversy he replied that criticism was good for people and that it didn't matter what they felt or did about it. I was inclined to agree.

Many old maps of all kinds, from cadastral maps of a parish to world maps, have been reproduced in facsimile by a photographic process, and there is generally an accompanying text. The facsimiles are nearly always so much reduced that the names are illegible. It would be easy to print a list of the names, arranged in some order that can be followed on the facsimile, but this is very seldom done. What purpose, then, does the facsimile fulfil? Beyond showing the extent of a coast line (if any) known at the time—none. The student wants to know the NAMES. Such a list would be far more valuable than the descriptive matter of the text usually is. A better course would be to reproduce a clearly legible facsimile—if necessary in sections. The only use of a facsimile is to save one the trouble of going to see the original (which is often impossible, especially nowadays). Some of the facsimiles in De la Roncière's 'Découverte de l'Afrique au Moyen Age' are wholly illegible, and the originals in Italy. Mannoni's facsimile of Egyptus Novelo is good and legible except where the names are concealed by the binding. It would have taken only a few minutes to copy these from the original (on which they can quite easily be read) and print them in the text. This was not done, and I had to go to Paris to do it myself. Such imperfect publication is unscholarly, and if not useless at any rate falls short of completeness. Ten minutes work on the original would have made all the difference.

The same criticisms apply to the scale when the original map has one. The figures are often illegible on the facsimile, nor is the unit always certain. A simple statement in the text would remedy this.

Students also want to know where they can consult the best detailed account of the map. Such accounts are often open to all the above criticisms, but they may be a little better than those given in books of a general character, such as histories of geographical discovery. Such bibliographical information must be known by the author and should be given.

Students who cannot read facsimiles have to travel to see the originals. They should be told where these are, and not only in what town but in what institution in that town. One may not be able to go there, but one can at least write and ask for a photostat, and 'Rome' and 'Venice' are insufficient addresses. If one goes, one has to write first to be sure that the institution will be open or the map still there. It is also unscholarly to give the name of the institution without the town in which it is; it may be considered to be of world-wide repute but one may not happen to have heard of it.

In attempting to identify the places named on an old map it is often assumed that its author was careless or inaccurate. He may have been, but he probably made the best use of the sources at his disposal, such as itineraries of actual journeys or voyages. The order in which these appear, on a coast-line or along a river, may be correct, even when the actual distances apart and positions are wrong. If a place X, which is unknown, is put between two known places, A and B, it is to be looked for, and may often be found,

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between these places on the modern map. Even if not, it is more likely to be there or thereabouts than 300 miles away on the other side of a range of mountains, where there is another place whose name begins with the same letter, or has some superficial resemblance to it.

In old maps there is a tendency for the same name, sometimes with variable spellings, to recur on a long sequence of maps. A name that cannot be identified on one map, either by the last mentioned method or otherwise, be identifiable on another. Sometimes the latest spelling provides a link with the modern form.

The course of roads may often be determined with precision by noting the places which lie (1) on it (2) on each side of it. By using this method it was possible to plot on the modern map the course of Ogilby's roads (1672) which, being strips or traverses, do not show much of the country through which they pass. But he rarely if ever placed a village on the wrong side of the road.

Places may often be identified by their *relative* distances apart, even when their *absolute* distances (as shown by the scale) are wrong. A place X may be twice as far from A as from B and be found to agree with the position of a known place. It is usually better to try several distances between X and known places before deciding where to place it, and to use proportionate distances, not actual ones.

In setting out to study an old map the first thing to do is of course to locate the places named on a modern map. It is best to begin by making a copy of the original (or facsimile), eliminating any irrelevant matter and drawing it with north at the top. For expository purposes the published account should consist of (1) a legible facsimile (if one does not already exist) (2) a copy of the original drawn as above (3) an outline taken from the modern map with the names on the old map shown (when possible) in their correct geographical positions. It may often not be possible to reproduce a facsimile, though this should always be done when one sets out to produce the definitive account of a particular map rather than the general study of a region. The text should give the reasons for the identifications, and (in the latter case) a list of all names on the original.

The proper elucidation of an old map is a fascinating task, but it involves a lot of hard work, and the drawing of diagrams. It should be remembered that the names have rarely if ever been *invented*; they may be strange and unrecognisable, but they are probably based ultimately on a real place-name, and it is the business of the student to trace its history and identify it. Without such an attempt the text is apt to degenerate into mere useless verbiage, describing what can (with good luck) be seen on the facsimile. Such texts resemble the old-fashioned museum labels which tell one what one can see for oneself and the name of the donor, but omit the provenance. There are many such texts, and it is in the hope of reducing their number in the future that I have written this note.

O.G.S.C.

MAPS OF THE A-E. SUDAN

In our June Editorial Notes we criticized the Sudan Government maps and suggested that 'air survey might have had priority over some other forms of expenditure'. We have received a letter from the Sudan Government Survey Department, written to 'refute some of this implied criticism'. The writer admits that the basic topographical map of the country (1 : 250,000) is often inaccurate and out of date, especially in desert areas, but points out that the land alongside the Nile as far south as Lat. 13°N. is covered by cadastral plans on scales ranging from 1 : 2500 to 1 : 4000. The demand is small, but is met by sun-prints. The main purpose served is administrative, and though

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' they do not always include much topographical detail, they do show any islands which are permanent and large enough to have been settled'. He goes on to say:—

' In addition to these cadastral maps maintained by us, the Egyptian Government has started to publish a series of 1 : 5000 contoured maps in the areas of the 2nd and 4th cataracts, which they have surveyed in connection with the proposed reservoir. Only a limited number of copies of the maps are at present available but an extra set was secured specially for the Commissioner for Archaeology.

' In addition to these large scale maps we have taken some trouble to secure, through the kindness of the United States Government, copies of some 60,000 air photographs which were taken over the Sudan by U.S.A.A.F. during the recent war. These air photographs can be consulted here and copies of individual prints can also be supplied on payment. Both the present and the late Commissioners for Archaeology have made frequent use of these photographs. We have ourselves already mapped from these photographs about 40,000 square miles; but it will naturally take a long time to map completely the half million or so square miles of country which they cover. We have also just recently obtained an Eagle IX air survey camera and hope to begin using it this winter in one of the Dove aircraft maintained by the Government air service. This camera was not obtained only for survey work and it will also be available for use by other departments, provided they can pay for chartering the aircraft. Most of these air survey developments were described in a recent article in *Sudan Notes and Records* (Vol. xxx, Part 1).

' I hope that these remarks will remove from your readers' minds the impression which your note must have created. The Sudan is as much larger than England as its resources are smaller, and one cannot expect accurate maps to cover it completely. Nevertheless, in areas that justify it economically, the position is far from being as bad as your note suggests'.

ROMAN LIBYA

The following report is reprinted from *The Times* of 28 September, 1950, by kind permission of the Editor.

A British expedition has just completed a two-month programme of archaeological reconnaissance and survey in the Syrtic and Cyrenaican regions of Libya, with the object of collecting information for a proposed map of Roman Libya. The expedition assembled in Tripoli early in July, and moved eastward along the coast of the Greater Syrtis to Benghazi, arriving there after having visited and surveyed many ancient sites on the route.

During August reconnaissances were carried out in the Gebel area of Cyrenaica and in the pre-desert zone to the south, with the assistance of the British military authorities in the territory. A two-week exercise 'Roman Swan', organized by Headquarters, Cyrenaica District, enabled the archaeologists to visit many sites not easily accessible. Air survey and photography were made possible by the collaboration of the Royal Air Force.

The British Administration of Tripolitania and the Government of Cyrenaica both gave the greatest encouragement and help to the expedition, and the observations made should assist the compilation of an inventory of those major ancient monuments for the preservation of which the future Libyan State will be responsible.

The areas visited include the region of Sirte (Tripolitania), rich in concrete-built farmhouses of the Roman period, the Mersa Brega zone, with the ancient city of Boreium,

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and the forts which defended southwestern Cyrenaica from the tribes of the Syrtica, the Barce and Beda areas of the Cyrenaican Gebel, and the desert route between El Abiar and Mechili. Many ancient buildings were planned, most of them being fortified homesteads of a type already well known in Tripolitania. The sloping reinforcement walls which surround these buildings testify to the earth tremors which shook eastern Libya during the later Roman period and caused the collapse of the great Doric temples of Cyrene.

The work of the expedition has thrown some new light on the Roman roads of Cyrenaica, and on the defensive system organized in the later Roman period. The Roman frontier organization seems to have been less deep than in Tripolitania, and was strongest in the south-western zone towards the Syrtica, from which direction the main barbarian attacks seem to have come. At Zaviet Msus, on the line of the desert route used so frequently during the recent war, a small Roman outpost was covered with the names of soldiers stationed there to protect the important cisterns and control the caravan routes.

Remains of the early Islamic period were also encountered by the expedition, including the site of the city of Sort (Medinet Sultan, near Sirte), and a line of mud-brick forts along the caravan route between El Abiar and Mechili. The last-named were probably intended to protect the important desert track from Egypt to Tunisia, which passed by Mechili, Zaviet Msus, and Agedabia.

The expedition has been working under the auspices of the Map of Roman Libya Committee, which was set up last year under the chairmanship of Professor R. E. M. Wheeler. Generous contributions towards the cost were made by the Royal Geographical Society, the University of Durham, the British Academy, the Society of Antiquaries, the Oxford and Cambridge Craven Committees, and other bodies. Graduates and undergraduates of Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, and Reading universities took part in the field work under the direction of Mr R. G. Goodchild.

The results show that much remains to be done in the recording of ancient buildings in Libya, but that the geographical limits of ancient occupation are fairly clearly defined. A complete archaeological survey would require many years of field-work, but useful topographical information can be obtained in a few seasons of long-range reconnaissance. During its two-month survey this summer the expedition covered nearly 1,500 miles of terrain.

THE CITY WALL OF KANO

The climate and early type of civilization developed in Nigeria did not aid the preservation of ancient monuments, but arid conditions as found in the Northern Provinces, which approximate closely to those of Upper Egypt, have dealt more kindly with the early efforts of Man than have the damp, humid jungle conditions found over the rest of the country. The only important buildings of antiquity in Nigeria which can be immediately referred back to early civilizations are the ancient walls round the large cities of the Hausa States in the Northern Provinces. Of these, the wall surrounding Kano is probably the oldest and certainly the most important one. The gaps in its history are wide indeed, but one can obtain quite a fair picture of its origins and development from contemporary writings, although other records from the area have not been preserved.

According to tradition, Hausa peoples approximately 1000 years ago migrated from Daura (N. of Kano) under their leader Kano and founded the town bearing his name. It is assumed that the wall was built at the same time. Being an important trading and transport centre, which it still is to this day, Kano was always a prize for conquering tribes and nations, consequently its wall would be preserved and kept in good repair

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for military reasons by all conquerors. The city was kept as a vassal under varying rulers for centuries, until in 1805 it came under the Fulani Empire and was the capital of Kano Emirate.

Although there were many rumours concerning a large and important walled city of Kano, it was not until 1824 that Clapperton actually visited it: the first time a European had entered its gates. He gives a brief description of the wall as being oval in shape, made of clay, 30 feet high, and approximately 15 miles in circumference. A dry ditch ran round the wall, both inside and outside, thus increasing its military value; 15 gates, including one recently built up, gave entrance to the city. The entrances were opened and closed daily and could be defended in case of attack. The next visitor to Kano was Dr H. Barth in 1850, who found traces of an older, dilapidated wall inside the city itself. This wall was not complete but may well have been the original site of the early township before it expanded to its present size. From that time, Kano was no longer a city of mystery but open to free trade with other Europeans.

During the British conquest of Nigeria a punitive column of British troops in 1903 attacked the main gates of Kano, but the attack failed. A neighbouring gate (Nassarawa gate) was breached; the town was stormed with few casualties; the Emir's palace was occupied and order quickly restored. Kano then came under the administration of the British Government.

The present state of the wall is bad. No repairs seem to have been undertaken since the British conquest of the city except that certain entrances have been widened to allow the entry of motor traffic into the city proper. In parts the wall merely consists of a high mound of sun-hardened mud and the protective ditches are gradually filling in to ground level. The gates and platforms built for defence have been removed, and many entrances hollowed out to form leper-holes. There are still 15 gateways into the city. The old ones are too small to allow even a small car to drive through in comfort and the wall in their neighbourhood is usually in a better state of preservation than in the neighbourhood of the new entrances to the business quarters. All remains of the ancient wall noticed by Barth have completely disappeared.

Unless preservation is undertaken quickly one more irreplaceable link with early historical times will have been irreparably damaged.

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