

Antiquity

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Editorial

OUR congratulations to the British Museum which has just produced *The British Museum; A Guide to its Public Services* (London, 1962; pp. 62, 9 plates, 6s.) and the first three of a new series of illustrated guidebooks at 5s. each, namely Christopher White's *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, Edmond Sollberger's *The Babylonian Legend of the Flood*, and A. F. Shore's *Portrait Painting from Roman Egypt*—an imaginative enterprise and evidence of change and progress in that great institution which has so often and so rightly been the butt of adverse criticism.

We wrote about the disappointingly slow post-war development of the British Museum some while ago when Sir Mortimer Wheeler launched an attack on old Auntie B.M. Now a fresh attack has been launched by Jacquetta Hawkes in *The Observer* for 17 June. She has much to say that is right and fair. She comments on the good ideas of the present Director, Sir Frank Francis, and gives credit for the opening of the new Laboratory, and the new Duveen Gallery which houses the Elgin Marbles. Incidentally a very attractive new *Historical Guide to the Sculptures of the Parthenon* has also been produced to mark the opening of the new Gallery: it is based on Professor Ashmole's *Short Guide*, the last impression of which was produced in 1961, and is wholly delightful, and at 7s. 6d., astonishingly good value.

The excellence of these publications points the moral to some of the criticism of the British Museum. It is not the energy and initiative of Director and staff that are at fault—although it cannot be denied that good modern display is not one of their strong points—but the lack of support from the Treasury and of understanding and direction from that very strange body of men who are the Trustees of the Museum.

Jacquetta Hawkes writes, 'The British Museum, Bloomsbury, is trying to wash behind its ears, is trying to change the dusty image of itself which has depressed us for so long . . . but . . . it is a duty at this moment to declare that the Museum has become a national disgrace . . . as a whole the British Museum of 1962 is a shambles'. Alas, the image of our Museums and our state archaeology is the image of ourselves. Surely a vigorously mounted campaign could ensure that the state paid more than lip-service to archaeology. It is not the British Museum which is a national disgrace: it is the British who are a disgrace archaeologically. It is sad to travel abroad and hear the disappointments which people feel about our national Museum. 'Le British' is still a magical word, in some ways even more magical than the Louvre. So little money could make that magic true.

The disappointment which we with so many other people feel regarding the interest

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of the British state in its National Museum and in museums in general has been put into very sharp perspective by a recent extensive tour which we have made of archaeology and museums in Hungary and Bulgaria. This was organized by the Hungarian Institute for Cultural Relations and the Bulgarian Committee for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Everywhere we visited we carried away with us an impression of great keenness for museums and archaeology and in many places a remarkably high standard of museum display. The new exhibition of Hungarian archaeology in the National Museum in Budapest is, as one might expect, very fine indeed. It is full of splendid things, and, what is so important in any Museum, national or regional, most intelligently and attractively set out. Here is a National Museum which believes in public exposition and in teaching the public as well as being a repository of the national treasures of the country. We show here two of the fine objects on display, the Copper Age pottery cart from Budakalász and the gold Scythian stag from Zoldhalompusza (PLATE XXI, and see ANTIQUITY, 1936, PLATE III, 6).

The excitement of museums like those in Budapest and elsewhere is that they are not museums of antiquities only but of the whole history of a country or region. There was none of the division we and the French tend to make between antiquities and by-gones, between archaeology and folk culture; these were visual and factual records of the past from the Palaeolithic to the last war. Where actual objects and people were not available there were always photographs and it was not surprising that the museums, even the small ones in small towns, were full of adults and children. That is what we must have in the centre of London—a Museum of the History of Britain. Bloomsbury must be re-organized.

Of course it is true, as Professor C. F. C. Hawkes, the President of the Council for British Archaeology, pointed out in his address to that Council on 5 July entitled 'The Health of Archaeology—Nations, Societies and Regions', that the British Museum did not begin as a National Museum. It was a national extension of private collections and is really an institutionalized form of dilettantism. So was the Louvre. Both these great collections in Paris and London are state versions of private cabinets of curiosities. In the British Museum in 1866 a Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography was formed with A. W. Franks as Keeper; the story of this has been well told by Sir Thomas Kendrick in his paper 'The British Museum and British Antiquities' (ANTIQUITY, 1954, 132). In France, however, at the insistence of the Emperor Napoleon III, a *Musée des Antiquités Nationales* was created by decree of 8 March, 1862, and opened by the Emperor in the Château of St-Germain-en-Laye on 12 May, 1867. The French Museum of National Antiquities, which is at the moment being reconstructed and enlarged, is now a hundred years old. What ought to happen in 1966 to celebrate the centenary of the creation of Franks's department is the opening in or near London of a Museum of the Antiquities and History of Britain. The Guildhall and the London Museums are to amalgamate. There is progress in the air. It is already planned to move the Library away from the present British Museum site. Why not move British and Medieval Antiquities to a new site as the nucleus of a new Museum of National Antiquities and halt the impending reconstruction of this department (ANTIQUITY, 1961, 313). The Government should set up at once a Committee to discuss the future status of the many components which now are called the British Museum. Certainly South Kensington should be completely divorced from Bloomsbury, the Library should be an independent National Library, our National Antiquities should go to a Museum of British Antiquities and History. Bloomsbury should be left, with its priceless treasures, as a Museum of non-British archaeology and antiquities—like the archaeological part of the Louvre.

We said advisedly 'a Committee', or a Commission. Don't let this matter be entrusted

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to Treasury officials or to a Working party. We report briefly from *Hansard* (p. 210 *infra*) the summary of what the working party of the Treasury on ancient monuments and historic buildings has decided. The answer seems, apart from the National Buildings Record, no change except for a new Co-ordinating Standing Committee. The Group, according to Sir Edward Boyle, have had the impertinence to recommend that 'there should be some reduction in the intensity of the archaeological work carried out by the Ordnance Survey'. Could the ignorance of civil servants and a cynical indifference to our cultural inheritance go further? The Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey under Mr Charles Phillips is one of the glories of British archaeology, and our archaeological mapping is the cynosure of eyes in all parts of Europe. We know of no country which has such good archaeological maps. To suggest putting a brake on the activities of the Archaeology Officer and his staff is to reveal the stupidity of entrusting an enquiry about our national antiquities in relation to the state to a group of ill-informed civil servants and members of Parliament. What a pity the former Editor of *ANTIQUITY* is not here to give his comments! Elsewhere in this number (p. 232 *infra*) we quote the sentence on the title page of Randall's *The Vale of Glamorgan*, namely 'The face of the country is the most important historical document that we possess'. This is the document which the Archaeology Officer and his staff record cartographically for us. We suggest that every facility should be given so that there is no reduction whatsoever in the intensity of the work carried out by them. Reduction is the way back. We want *more* work from the Ordnance Survey—more maps like that of Early Iron Age Britain published last month.



In our Editorial in June (*ANTIQUITY*, 1962, 83), we referred to the British Academy report *Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, with its plea, *inter alia*, for money for such research. As we go to press we learn in a written Parliamentary reply by Lord Hailsham, Lord President of the Council and Minister for Science that, subject to Parliamentary approval, the British Government is to make an additional grant of £25,000 to the British Academy next year to enable the academy to begin implementing its scheme for the support of research in the humanities. This is excellent news. Apparently the social sciences are excluded as they presented a different problem involving wider Governmental interests. Lord Hailsham added 'We envisage that in, say, two or three years' time, the figure might rise to a steady level of £50,000 a year'. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, secretary of the British Academy, commented as follows, 'This is an innovation: it is the first time that the humanities have been given specific recognition by the Government' (*The Times*, Wednesday, 11 July) and added that this money would enable the Academy to give assistance to scholars wishing to take a sabbatical year, to provide research grants and to finance projects in such subjects as history, literature, archaeology and anthropology. Splendid.



What a pleasure it is, in the middle of reading stiff and severe works of primary archaeological scholarship, or reflecting on the pedestrian performance of Working Groups, to come across something so light-hearted, satirical and witty as Serge Hutin's *Les Civilisations inconnues: mythes ou réalités* (Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, pp. 237, 1961, 12.33 N.F.), a book to be put on the shelves alongside Wahlgren's *The Kensington Stone*, Isnard's *Faux et Imitations dans L'Art*, Sonia Cole's *Counterfeit*, and many another from the classics of Robert Munro and Vayson de Pradenne onwards. Monsieur Hutin is not, however, concerned with physical forgeries, although he gives a very good account of

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l'affaire Glazel: he is concerned with the fake theories and fraudulent comparisons which build up the mental forgeries, and which are in many ways more dangerous as more lasting.

Here is a book which should be read by all interested in the lunatic fringes of archaeology and ancient history. The author is especially interested in the credulities and comforting unreasons of the human mind; he has already written on secret societies, gnosticism, alchemy and freemasonry. Here he turns his attention to the beliefs in lost civilizations, vanished cities, intercontinental connexions, and non-existent cultures, which so frequently bedevil the serious study of the ancient past. To turn over the pages is to go through a calendar of scandalous old friends, disgraceful and foolish old acquaintances—mazes, Phoenicians, Atlantis, Lemuria, Mu, Devil's Walls, Noah's Ark, Sumerian refugees in Somerset, Madame Blavatsky, Earth-Mother Goddesses, Giants and Fairies, serpents and serpent's rings, pre-adamites, asexual Hyperboreans, Eldorado, Ignatius Donnelly, Guanches and Basques, lost paradises, Quetzalcoatl, Velikowsky, Tuahuanaco, Rudolf Steiner, Easter Island, Thule, oricalcium, Osiris, Gog and Magog, St Brendan, the lost tribes of Israel, inscribed meteorites, Sodom and Gomorrah, cataclysms and labyrinths—all our old favourites are here. No, not perhaps all: Troy, Brutus, the old straight tracks, the Margate grotto, comets, Druids—here are half a dozen that come straight to mind that are not there. But there are many new things, or new to us, such as the revelations of the Italian medium Beatrice Valtronesis to Dom Neroman, Dr Ronald Strath's nine Maya inscriptions recording the destruction of Atlantis in 5000 B.C., and Daniel Ruzo's Masma culture (characterised, *inter alia*, by non-existent megaliths) on the plateau of Marcahuasi in Peru. New to us too were the theories that flying saucers must have been used by the people who laid out the hill figures at Cerne Abbas and Uffington, Jean-Louis Bernard's statement in his *L'Égypte et la Genèse du Surhomme* (Paris, 1957, 4) that 'un peuple *pré-historique* peut aussi être un peuple *post-historique*', and the article in the *New York American* for 20 October, 1912, entitled 'Comment j'ai retrouvé l'Atlantide disparue, source de toute civilisation', by a Dr Paul Schliemann, declaring himself to be a grandson of the great Heinrich, and announcing that he had found a map used by the expedition sent by a Pharaoh in 4571 B.C. looking for the traces of Atlantis.

Hutin's book is no mere calendar of follies and unreasoning beliefs. He asks us to remember that all the theories and indeed facts that we dub as improbable or even impossible may not in the passage of time be all nonsense; it took over twenty years for Altamira to be accepted and forty for Piltown to be exposed—orthodox archaeology is by no means always correct. There may be some grain of truth, he argues, or at least some stimulating thought, in apparent lunacies. He very properly asks that archaeologists and ancient historians should not be hide-bound and bigoted: at the same time he exposes the slender bases on which the major archaeological fantasies and lunacies are based. His own knowledge of archaeology is not above reproach but in a book which deals with such wide horizons and surveys false ideas about so many specialized subjects in archaeology and ancient history, it would be unlikely if any author survived without making mistakes. This is a book to possess for its bibliography alone—a wonderful catalogue of wishful thinking, wanton learning, unconscious deceptions, and *dementia archaeologia*.

The really depressing thing is that *exposés* such as this seem to have so little effect on the dotty people who gyre and gimple in the lunatic wabes of archaeology, the mangrove tentacles holding them down in the mud till the sun beats any sense out of their heads. In this number Mr Feachem reviews, with characteristic wit and detachment Mr Ashe's strange book *Land to the West* (p. 231), a good example of the confusion of learning and non-learning. Recently we were sent, perhaps to educate us after what we wrote in an earlier issue (ANTIQUITY, 1958, 264), a small book by O. G. Landsverk called *The Kensington*

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Runestone (privately printed by The Church Press, Glendale, California: 2 dollars). It is described as 'A reappraisal of the circumstances under which the stone was discovered'. It insists on the authenticity of the find, and cannot understand Wahlgren's arguments. It is a very good example of a man wanting to believe something so passionately that he argues himself furiously into circles. Why will people do this in subjects in which they are not expert? It is to us an eternal mystery how a man like Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, distinguished doctor and physical anthropologist, could abandon the reason and good sense and critical faculties he used in his professional life when he moved away to his non-professional interests of prehistory.

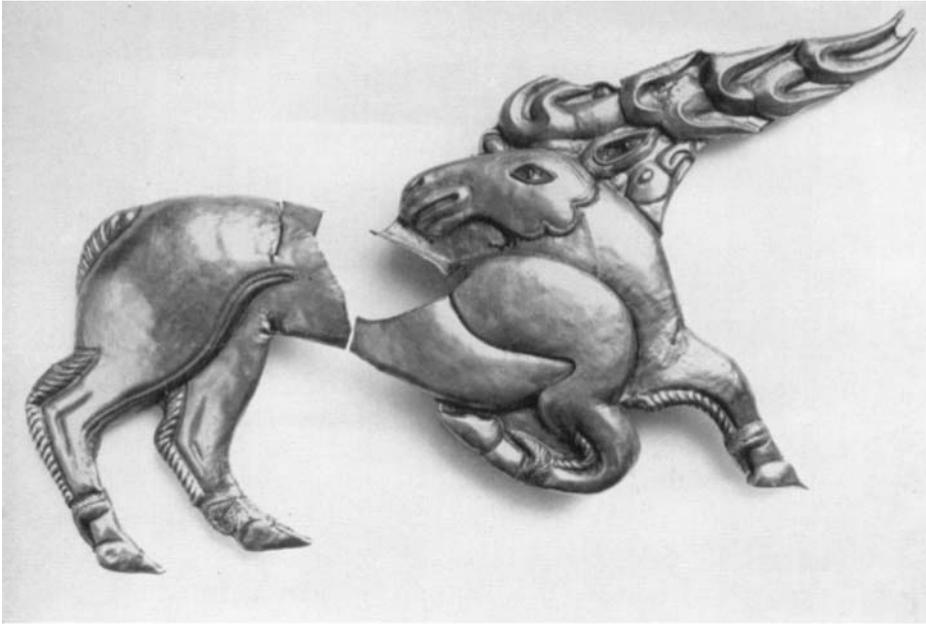
But there it is; this is always happening. If ANTIQUITY stands for anything in the world of scholarship and vulgarization it must stand for two things: the quick simple dissemination to a wide public of recent discoveries made by excavation and comparative study and its synthesis into our new knowledge of the old past, and the unrelenting exposure of frauds and false thinking, of follies and untruths. Some responsible scholars believe that bad books should not be reviewed; that neglect will breed contempt and forgetfulness. We do not believe this, we know only too well that all over the world, from wayward undergraduate to B.B.C. producer to publisher's reader there are people, otherwise sensible and sane, people who would not believe in six-headed cats and blood-curdling spectral monsters, who yet read some folly about Noah's ark or Atlantis or cataclysmic world-tides, and say, with a contented sigh, 'There may be something in it, you know'.



At least one very good thing has happened. We commented recently (ANTIQUITY, 1961, 173) on the annual Midsummer lunacies at Stonehenge which reached alarming proportions in 1961. We said that the reports of what happened at the summer solstice in 1961 revealed 'a monstrous, wicked and most undesirable state of affairs and one which the Minister must bring to an end; and certainly by next Midsummer'. We are very glad that this has happened. In a statement dated 28 May, 1962, the Ministry of Works announced that 'because of hooliganism and rowdy behaviour in recent years, the public will not be admitted to Stonehenge at 9.30 p.m. the evening preceding midsummer day as hitherto. The monument and the car park will remain closed in the evening and will be opened to the public at 3.30 a.m. on 21 and 22 June, 1962'. So far, so good, and we learn that this year there was no hooliganism and rowdy behaviour and indeed fairly small crowds. The report of the Ancient Monuments Board for England for 1961 (ordered by The House of Commons to be printed on 30 May, 1962: H.M.S.O., 2s.) goes further; it recommends to the Minister of Works 'that the time has now come for an absolute ban on solstice ceremonies at Stonehenge since they have become, no doubt against the wishes of the organizers, the focal point of irresponsible behaviour which it seems impossible to check'. The Minister should implement this recommendation; in 1963, no bogus-Druids, please, and the normal opening hour for Stonehenge.

There is one curious thing in all this. The 1962 ban does not refer merely to 21 June—Midsummer Day according to some (the 24th according to others), but to 22 June as well. *The Times* of London supplies the answer: 'The Druids are holding their ceremonies a day later this year in accordance with their calendar'!! How dotty *can* we get?

PLATE XXI



(a)



(b)

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(a) Gold Scythian stag from Zoldhalompusztá. (b) Copper Age waggon model from Grave 177 of the cemetery at Budakalász. Both in the National Museum of Hungary, Budapest.

See p. 164]

[Photos: National Museum, Budapest