

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

NOT long ago we suggested that archaeologists (and others too) could learn much from the study of air-photographs of primitive homesteads and their adjacent cultivations. Such views enable one to visualize these settlements far more clearly and completely than one could from a ground view or even from a plan. Supplemented of course by a more leisurely investigation on the spot, they provide comparative material that assists the excavator in his imaginative reconstruction of prehistoric sites. They also have an intrinsic value and interest of their own for the anthropologist who is concerned with primitive economy.



It was therefore not altogether a surprise to find a number of striking illustrations of these remarks in the October number of the *GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW* (published by the American Geographical Society, Broadway at 156th Street, New York). These were taken by Richard and Mary Upjohn Light during a cruise from Capetown to Cairo. They are not confined to primitive native settlements, but show also the up to date farms and plantations of white settlers. The authors took the trouble to qualify themselves beforehand in photography as well as in aeronautics; and being fortunately independent of commercial control, were able to pursue a leisurely course and take an intelligent and lively interest in the marvellous country they traversed. Their

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cruise of 2½ months contrasts vividly with stunt-flights undertaken to advertise some kind of oil or engine ; for it achieved results of real social and scientific value.



The result is a series of vivid pictures of life in Africa such as we have never before seen. It has been left to citizens of the United States of America to do this traversing the whole African continent, and flying throughout over the territory of the British Commonwealth and Egypt. The authors of the flight have brought back with them about a thousand air-photographs altogether, of which about 650 were taken in Africa, and 1800 Leica photographs taken on the ground. It is good news that the American Geographical Society, where a set of them has been deposited, 'has under consideration the publication of a large selection . . . in book form'. May we here express the hope that this project will be carried out, and that the plates will be as large as possible, so that all-important details (of huts, cultivations, roads and such like) may be plainly visible? One cannot use a magnifier with effect on a half-tone plate.



Is it too much to hope that some day the British Commonwealth will do something for itself now that America has shown the way? To expect anything from the shopkeepers' island itself is perhaps too much ; but there should be intelligent people in Africa who appreciate the interest and beauty of their own continent. These native villages represent a stage in the development of human society that, as the photographs show, is rapidly giving place to another. The time to record them is now, before they have passed away. We commend these remarks to our numerous readers in South Africa, in the hope that they may take up the matter.



The present state of affairs is not one with which we in this country can be content. Directly or indirectly we control, or are politically and commercially interested in, a very large portion of the earth's surface ; we have the means and opportunity of forming a magnificent collection of air-views of every kind of land, from the Arctic Regions

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to the Tropics. Our aeroplanes fly over the whole of Africa and large parts of Asia and Australia. Many air-photographs are being taken all the time, either officially by the Royal Air Force (for training or survey purposes), or by private individuals. Yet there is no central store where negatives can be deposited when they have served their purpose. Many of them are destroyed when their immediate purpose is fulfilled, though they are original documents of great scientific value. They are of educational value also to students of geography, geology, forestry and economics, and are in demand by such (and by others) to illustrate books and articles. Compared with the original cost of taking them, the cost of storage and handling such material is trifling; but it is nobody's business to organize a system of preservation and of making them accessible to the public (who have paid for them).



There is another optimistic forecast that has, it seems, been fulfilled, though again we do not suggest any relation of cause and effect. Ebba de Geer has succeeded in equating the growth-rings of trees from the ancient mound called Raknehaugen, in the Romerike district of Norway, with those of a giant Californian Sequoia on the one hand and with clay-varves from Angermanland in North Sweden on the other.* The mound is a well-known landmark and local antiquity, and is 60 feet high. A shaft sunk in it in 1868-9 revealed a complex timber structure, and at the base a layer of birch and cloven pine-logs. No human remains were found; only the remains of a horse, badly preserved. Some of the pieces of timber were kept locally as souvenirs, and thus became available for the present investigation. It is concluded that the trees were cut, and the mound therefore built, in A.D. 931.



It would be rash to accept the full implications of this most important research until it has, quite properly, been fully considered and perhaps subjected to criticism, and until it is supported, as we hope it will be, by confirmatory evidence from other work of the same kind. One hoped that it might be possible to apply the method of dendrochronology to European material, but it seemed that differences of

* Account by Ebba Hult de Geer in the *Universitetets Oldsaksamlings Arbok*, 1937, pp. 27-54. (Brøgger, Oslo, 1938).

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climate might prevent this. Apparently, however the variations of growth may be associated with solar radiation, and thus be independent of climate. If that be so, and the method can be used here, we shall have a magnificent opportunity of dating not only our own early historic monuments but also prehistoric ones. Any site, such as a lake-dwelling, a tree-trunk burial or a dug-out canoe that can provide a section, will automatically date itself, when subjected to treatment. This, if it becomes possible, will convert archaeology into an exact science where matters of chronology are concerned, and the assignment of date is of course the first object of every archaeologist. One looks naturally to East Anglia and its cultural centre in the hope that yet another Scandinavian technique may be learnt and applied in that receptive quarter.



Subscriptions for 1939

The present number begins a new year—subscriptions for 1939 are therefore due. We are grateful to those who have already sent their cheques, and we ask those who have not done so (always excepting those who pay through their bank or bookseller) to remember that payment without formal request is doubly appreciated, for it saves a deal of correspondence.

A form and envelope were inserted in the December number.

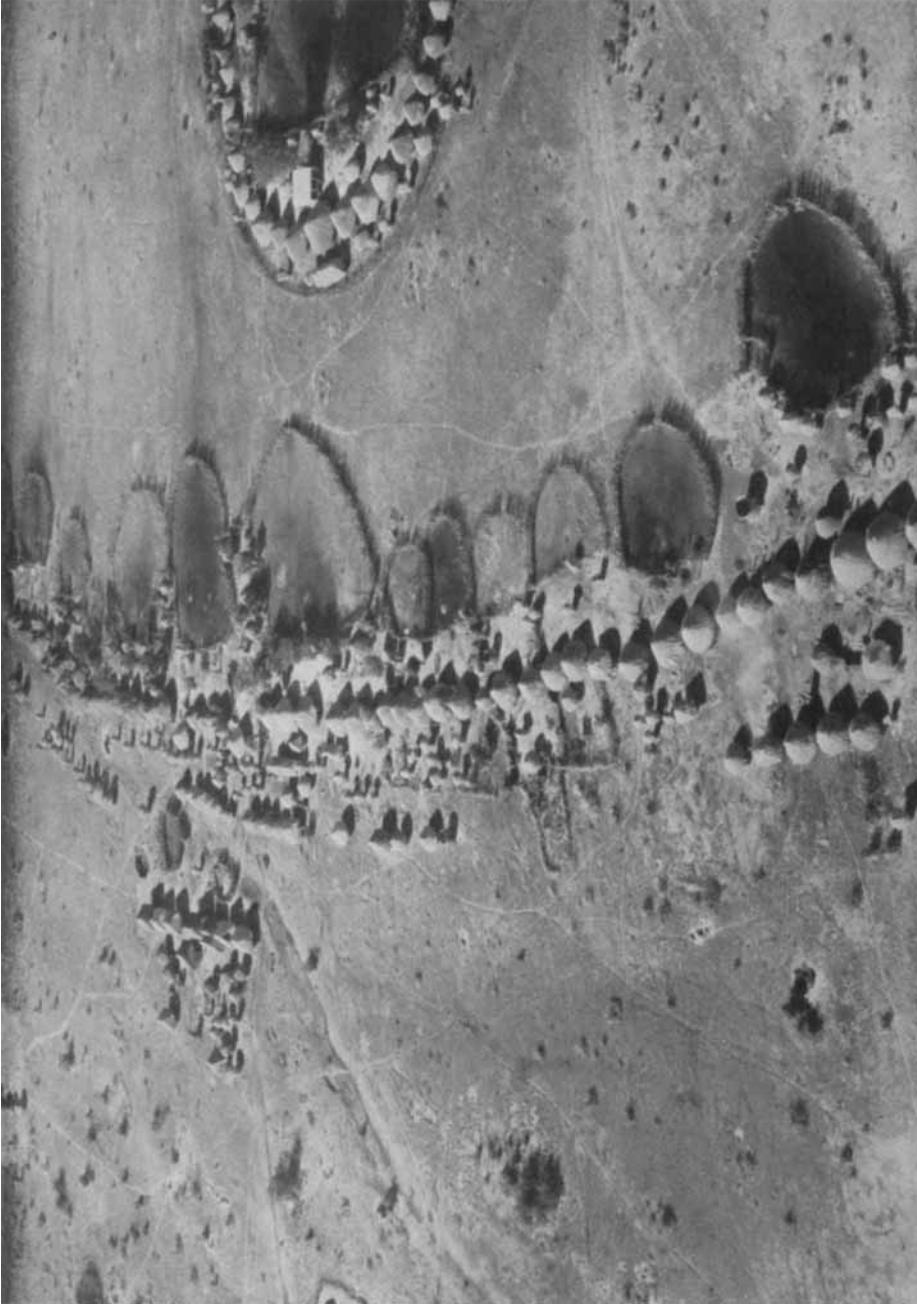
PLATE I



THE VILLAGE OF MUKOBELA, NORTH RHODESIA, WHICH SHELTERS ABOUT 2000 OF THE BA ILA TRIBE.
THERE ARE NEARLY 1000 HUTS AND A CORRAL FOR 5000 HEAD OF CATTLE
Courtesy of the American Geographical Society and Richard and Mary Upjohn Light

facing p. 4

PLATE II



A MORE DETAILED VIEW OF PART OF THE BA ILA VILLAGE AT MUKOBELA, NORTH RHODESIA, SHOWING THE STRUCTURES WHICH FORM THE VILLAGE CIRCLE. THE OTHER STRUCTURES ARE KITCHENS, DWELLINGS, THE STOCKADE, AND CATTLE PENS

Courtesy of the American Geographical Society and Richard and Mary Uppjohn Light