

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

LAST June we spoke of the need for appointing immediately a Director of Antiquities for the Aden Protectorate, and we mentioned the fact that the Sudan Government had at last made a similar appointment for its own territory. For this good deed it deserves the thanks and congratulations of all archaeologists and anthropologists. But, good as it is, it does not go far enough. The Sudan covers a vast area. It is not, like Egypt, a narrow densely populated Nile-corridor, but a huge plain watered by annual summer rains and dotted with villages and granite 'gebels', standing out like pink islands in a sea of mimosa thorn. Throughout the whole of this area, more particularly in the valleys of the Nile and its tributaries, are the remains of ancient settlements. As cultivation spreads these are progressively endangered. Every day probably something irreplaceable is destroyed and a fragment of history gone for ever.



In the past the only archaeological post in the Sudan has been that of Conservator of Antiquities. The post was not a full-time one, the work being done in his spare time by a government official; the last three persons to hold it were the Director of Education, an Inspector of Education and the Government Geologist. With the creation of the new full-time post of Commissioner of Archaeology and Anthropology, that of Conservator of Antiquities has been allowed to lapse; but it is intended to revive it as soon as the country can afford it; and we may say that the creation of this post at the present difficult moment in its

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history reflects the greatest credit upon the Sudan Government. Those who know anything of the Sudan, whether directly or through the admirable medium of *Sudan Notes and Records*, realize that the Government is sympathetic and that it can be relied upon to carry out its intentions at the earliest available opportunity.



At present the duties of the Conservator of Antiquities are being performed by the Commissioner, but he is sadly overworked. In addition to supervising and helping the anthropological investigations of government officials, missionaries and specialists in the provinces, the new Commissioner is finding his time more than fully occupied in looking after the various museums (particularly the archaeological and ethnological collections) and the innumerable ancient sites—ancient Egyptian, Ethiopian, Meroitic and Christian—dotted at intervals of a few miles along the Nile Valley between Khartoum and Wadi Halfa; and there are many others in the valley of the Blue Nile and elsewhere throughout the vast Sudan.



The protection of these widely scattered sites is as urgent as it is difficult. The sites are looked on by the natives as convenient quarries for stone and manure (*marōg*); and often, where elaborate temples have been constructed of sandstone, the stone has become so impregnated with salt that exposure to the atmosphere by excavation has in many cases caused the rapid disintegration of the fabric.



There is a crying need for a permanent museum at Khartoum to house in a worthy fashion (so that they will be protected both from the climate and the ignorant, and also made available for study) not only the country's share of movable finds from past excavations carried out by the Harvard-Boston expeditions, Oxford Excavations in Nubia, and the Egypt Exploration Society and others, but also masonry of historical or artistic value which cannot be safely preserved on its original site.



Hitherto the country has had to be content with one room in Gordon College in which is displayed a small, very valuable, and as yet

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unpublished, collection of the smaller Sudanese antiquities dating between 1800 B.C. and A.D. 300. There is no room to display the additions to the collection that have been made in the last seven years : and these and other materials for student collections have been kept in boxes in temporary stores until such time as the country could afford a museum. It has however now been realized that it is impossible to keep many of the antiquities safely in boxes for an indefinite period. The packing and the boxes themselves deteriorate from the action of white ants, dry rot, etc., with resultant damage to specimens when moved ; and the damp atmosphere of the rainy season plays havoc with salt-impregnated stone and faience. The construction of a permanent museum being at present beyond the finances of the Sudan, temporary accommodation is being provided, so that next year it should be possible to make the whole archaeological collection safe from further deterioration, and available for students.



More than this however is needed ; a fairy godmother is urgently required by the Sudan, to provide it with a permanent museum with sufficient room to display on modern lines its unrivalled ethnological and archaeological specimens, to preserve for posterity representative pieces of masonry from the Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Meroitic sites of the country, and to enable gaps to be filled in the present collections, particularly in the representation of the prehistoric Stone Age cultures and of the Dark Age of the Sudan (*c.* A.D. 500–1500).

Such a gift would benefit not only the inhabitants of the Sudan, who are beginning to take an interest in their country's past, but also students of early African culture generally. In the past, waves of culture have repeatedly flowed through the Sudan into the lands that lie to the south and west of it : as was pointed out in a recent number of *ANTIQUITY*, in parts of the Sudan today there still survive (but only for a short time longer, in the face of the destructive advance of western influences) ancient customs and techniques that have already been obliterated in Egypt and elsewhere.



A permanent museum at Khartoum, if erected now, would ensure the preservation for posterity of such evidence of the past as survives to the present day. In a very few years it will be too late. The provision of an adequate staff and endowment would enable it to become a

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centre for the compilation, publication, and exchange of information about north-east Africa as a whole. The geographical position of Khartoum is ideal for this purpose.



We wish the Sudan Government every success in the forward move which it has made by appointing its first Commissioner for Archaeology and Anthropology. But progress must not stop there. More is required than one whole-time official for this vast area. An adequate museum and staff are the next essentials and they are long overdue. (A geological survey which will make its publications available to workers in neighbouring countries is also urgently required). Anyone desiring further information is invited to communicate with the Commissioner, Box 178 Khartoum, who will be glad to answer any enquiry. Here is a magnificent opportunity for a public-spirited millionaire or for one of the great endowed Corporations. We hope these words may meet the eyes of some such before it is too late.

Anglo-Saxon Ship-burial in East Suffolk

A most important archaeological discovery has been made in East Suffolk. A ship-burial of an early Anglo-Saxon leader has been found, dating from about A.D. 600. The funeral offerings were put in a great rowing-boat, which had been drawn up from the water and placed bodily in the trench-grave dug for its reception. The boat had a length of 82 feet and a beam of 16 feet. Nothing remains of it but a pattern of iron clench-nails in the ground; but grave-goods of great archaeological interest accompanied the burial. These are now in the care of the British Museum authorities. It should be added that the body itself has not been found.

By the kindness of the responsible authorities we hope to publish a full account of this outstanding discovery as an illustrated article in our December number.