



JERICOH: LOOKING WEST FROM THE SUMMIT OF THE TELL TOWARDS THE MOUNT OF TEMPTATION

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Editorial Notes

IF one can imagine a millionaire or a government interested in the history of the human race or of civilization and anxious to promote the study thereof, how could they most profitably invest their money today? The question is not wholly academic; such persons may exist, and one would suppose that these subjects might come within the scope of Unesco. One may assume that the advancement of knowledge is accepted as a desirable end. Once upon a time it was imagined that this end was attained merely by writing books about other books or by speculations about the Infinite and the Nature of Being. That time has passed, though Unesco, which is about to launch a new and expensive philosophical journal, still seems to be living in it. Since modern science began in the 17th century it has become evident, from the results obtained, that knowledge is advanced only by a study of facts. This demands two things—leisure, and apparatus or equipment. Students must be enabled to live, and they must have access to the facts. The former proposition is obvious; research is a whole-time occupation. Access to the facts, in archaeology and many other branches of science, involves field-work (which costs money) and work in museums where the results of field-work are stored. That brings us to the crux.



A museum must be not only large enough to store its contents and exhibit a selection, but the contents must be properly arranged so that they can be studied. One that contains merely packing-cases full of objects is, so long as they remain there, useless. It must have a laboratory for conserving and repairing objects; specimens deteriorate if not treated, and broken pots must be mended. Every museum is at present understaffed; almost the whole time of the overworked staff is spent in mere administration, and much of it is wasted in answering impudent questions about trifling expenditure. Only the stoutest can wear down the persistency of ignorant financial clerks and find time for research as well. If a person is fit for the responsible post of Director of Antiquities, he should not have to explain why transport is needed to conduct an excavation. (We have an actual example in mind). Museum staffs, therefore, need enlargement and less pettifogging interference. But when this has been done, there is a crying need for the

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endowment of students who may not be members of the permanent staff, to study the contents. There are, for instance, hundreds of cuneiform tablets still untranscribed, uncatalogued and often hardly even examined. By 'uncatalogued' we do not mean unregistered, but the mere block entry of a collection in the museum register of accessions, though quite necessary, is utterly inadequate. Quantities of papyri are in the same condition. The sort of thing that needs doing is what was done by the National Museum of Wales and the London Museum when they published their famous Catalogues.



Something on the lines suggested has been done in a few countries. But it should be remembered that to endow a student for a particular piece of research may impose a strain on an already overstrained staff; and in any case endowment is premature if the collections to be studied are still packed up: the strain becomes intolerable when, to the duties of a museum curator are added those of a Conservator of National Antiquities. We do not know how far our remarks may apply to the Archaeological Survey of the Union of South Africa, whose Report for 1950-1 has just reached us. Some of the contents illustrate these remarks so well that we quote them here. The Survey is housed rent-free by the University of Witwatersrand, which is to be congratulated for its public spirit in undertaking what should be a government responsibility. But that accommodation is 'totally inadequate', and cripples the Survey's activities. 'Unless adequate accommodation is provided in the near future, the Survey will . . . degenerate into a purely administrative body. The vast archaeological wealth of the Union, especially that portion of it which is capable of throwing so much light on the earliest chapters of human history, is crying out for systematic exploration. Prehistorians in all parts of the world look to South Africa for intensified exploratory work, and when it is realised that our obligations are of an international rather than of a purely national order, the fact that we cannot meet them because we have neither the accommodation nor the staff we require, is a sad reflection of the ill-balanced times in which we live'.



We endorse every word of this appeal. We do so the more unhesitatingly because, as stated, the need is an international one. Prehistory is one and indivisible; we cannot investigate the problems of human evolution on a merely national basis; they are as much the concern of Europeans as of South Africans, and Europeans to-day, in the unhappy state of their continent, look more and more to other lands to carry on the struggle. One would not wish to antagonize governments by caustic criticism, however justified; it is a fact, however, that in two other regions of Africa—Nigeria and Kenya—the governments concerned have failed in their duty to provide accommodation which in both is due to private enterprise of a very laudable nature.



Our first concrete proposal, therefore, adumbrated in the first paragraph of these Notes, is addressed to governments which should start setting their archaeological houses in order. When this has been done students should be assisted in studying certain aspects of the contents. Exactly what form such endowments should take is not for us to suggest except in very general terms; specialists will be only too ready to fill in the details. But we think there will be a general agreement about the need, and that in voicing it we are merely giving expression to widely held opinions. We can do so freely because we

