

Antiquity

VOL. XX No. 80

DECEMBER 1946

Editorial Notes

WE publish in this number some of the discoveries made by means of air-photography during the war. The photographs speak for themselves, and would alone suffice to establish the power of air-photography as an instrument of research, were not that now admitted. The sites are all crop-sites, and the outlines of the huts and enclosing ditches are revealed by the differential growth of the crops. Thus it is now quite certain that crop-sites, already well known in this island, may be looked for elsewhere. Of course we all knew this already, but not many crop-sites have, in actual fact, come to light hitherto outside England; and it is satisfactory to know that the method worked equally well in the very different climate of Apulia.



The moment is opportune for taking stock of the present position. What has air-photography accomplished during the last quarter of a century? The work done in this country will be familiar to most readers of *ANTIQUITY*, in which so many of the photographs have appeared. On the continent of Europe little has been done, chiefly because of the great gulf fixed between archaeologists and the Air Forces of their countries. It cannot too often be said that the *only* way to be sure of making discoveries and getting the best results is for trained archaeologists to fly and take their own photographs. A beginning has been made in Switzerland, but without any particularly striking results. During the war German archaeologists secured some good air-photographs of Gaulish Oppida, but all attempts to unearth them again have been unsuccessful. They are probably still in existence somewhere, however, and may eventually come to light. The Iberian peninsula has many sites admirably suited for air-photography, and one of the Roman town of Numantia was once taken. There must be many prehistoric hill-forts in Portugal that would brilliantly repay taking. We commend these suggestions to our colleagues in those countries.



What of the great riverine civilizations of the East? Many air-photographs have been taken, but few published. Here we fear the archaeologists are largely to blame. Some years ago we made a suggestion for a handbook of Iraq, illustrated by air-photographs of the chief sites, both ancient and medieval. Iraq contains the finest such sites in the world—sites which are not only in themselves of great historical interest, but which are also ideal subjects, both as shadow-sites and (to a lesser degree) as crop-sites. Such a handbook would be easy to compile, for the photographs already exist,

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and others could easily be taken in the ordinary routine of practice. Apart from its value as an archaeological record, the book would have had, we think, a certain political value. But the idea did not commend itself to those concerned, and nothing was done. Although it was the sight of the amazing ruins, 20 miles long, of Old Baghdad (Samarra) that first revealed to Major Beazeley the possibilities of the method, he did not publish any of them himself, and the finest air-photo site in the world remains still unpublished. The work of Father Poidebard in Syria needs no further praise here, for it has already been fully described in special review-articles in ANTIQUITY. It is a conspicuous example of the vast new knowledge that can be obtained in a short time by a trained archaeologist who does his own flying.



Recently we have received a magnificent volume of air-photographs taken in Persia*, and containing 110 plates. To us one of the chief new discoveries appears to be the great frontier-wall of earth, stretching from the Caspian to the mountains for over 100 miles, and protecting the cities of the Gurgan plain, and all Persia to the south, against incursions of the nomad hordes of Central Asia. Strictly speaking it is not a new discovery, for the wall is marked on the maps; but when we made enquiries some years ago we were unable to find anyone who knew anything about it, or had ever heard of it. It is called Alexander's Barrier (Sadd-i-Sikandar), or the Red Snake (Qizil Yilan), and has a series of about 30 rectangular forts set at intervals along the south side. Unfortunately only two photographs of the wall are published, both obliques and neither of them very good. It is not possible, without a good vertical view, to form any opinion of the age or character of the wall or its forts, which remain therefore to be discovered.



Some idea of the harvest waiting to be gathered is given by the views of a town (or of two different towns?) on plates 66 and 67. A vast area is covered with the ruins of houses planned on a more or less rectangular framework. Here and there are short parallel lines set close together, suggesting the remains of vaulted bazaars such as are common in all Mohammedan cities; and there can be little doubt that here is one of the cities of the province of Jurjan described by Mukaddasi and other Arab writers of the 10th century. Running through one of the cities here illustrated may be seen two long bands which may represent roads, but may also perhaps be canals. Jurjan itself, the capital, was intersected by canals, crossed by arched bridges or by planks laid on boats.



Enough has been said to show what a single expedition was able to accomplish in a short space of time in a country where such work had never before been undertaken. For its accomplishment the author of this book, and the Oriental Institute of Chicago, deserve the thanks of all students. It was pioneer work, a preliminary reconnaissance, and must therefore be judged as such. Nevertheless it is to be regretted that, both in style and composition, the book leaves much to be desired. Of the style we will say no more than that it repels us. But the book might so easily have been better put together. The best form for such a book is surely a framework of illustrations, fully described,

* Flights over ancient cities of Iran, by Erich F. Schmidt: special publication of the Oriental Institute of Chicago. University of Chicago Press. No date. The flights were made in 1935-7.

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with a descriptive text kept entirely separate. An attempt, made here, to combine the two is most unsatisfactory. It is extremely difficult, and sometimes impossible, to discover (on the excellent maps printed) where the sites illustrated are situated. The details given include the exact time, to a minute, the height, and photographic details, but omit the vitally important fact—where the site is ! Nor has the temptation to publish pretty pictures been resisted often enough. One could well have sacrificed, e.g. plate 51 A, of a landing at Tepe Burm, or plate 57, of a cloud-sea, for a good vertical of one of the wall-forts. The method of reproduction, too, is unsatisfactory ; for the best results there is nothing to beat half-tones.



For future work the following areas may be suggested, in the hope that these words may one day be read by someone who can give effect to them.

Undoubtedly the most promising areas are those in the neighbourhood just described—Iraq on one side and Turkmenistan on the other. Of Iraq enough has been said. But the other area lies within the U.S.S.R. ; and it is strange that, in spite of the good archaeological work done there in recent years, not a single archaeological air-photograph has yet, so far as the present writer is aware, been published.

Another virgin field is the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Not perhaps so promising an area, it yet contains sites, such as Soba, which may well produce startling results when seen and photographed from above. A strip-series taken along the Blue Nile from Khartoum to Sennar or Roseires would certainly be most informative, and reveal many new sites. A similar series along the Atbara, from Berber to Kassala, would also be very useful.



There are other kinds of sites that should also be photographed before they disappear—the primitive villages of Africa. Some very good work has already been done in South Africa (see *ANTIQUITY* XIII, 1939, 1–3 and plates), again by American citizens. Nothing so far has been done by citizens of the British Empire, who might be expected to take a livelier interest in it than others. Again we suggest illustrated handbooks showing the different kinds of native settlements found in a given territory, such as the Sudan. The trouble is that those who are able to take such photographs are only too often unaware of the extent of their opportunities ; and of the fact that, beyond their ken, there exists, in many other countries beside their own, a keen interest in the manner of living, the history or the geography of other races of peoples. We fancy that such a handbook as we suggest would be welcomed by all administrators of the areas concerned, and might well be found useful by university teachers responsible for the education of candidates for the service. In other words, there would be a good sale for it ; and this argument at least should carry weight.



With this number *ANTIQUITY* completes its 20th volume (1926–47). Once more the Editors thank Subscribers for their continued support. Subscriptions (£1) become due and early payment will be appreciated. A form is enclosed (except to those who already use Bank Orders. Others may also find it convenient to use that method).

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