



ROMAN FORT, BECKFOOT, CUMBERLAND

Journal of Roman Studies, 1951, plate IV, 2

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ROMAN FORT, GLENLOCH, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE

Journal of Roman Studies, 1951, plate VII, 1

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Editorial Notes

READERS of ANTIQUITY sometimes complain that we do not publish more articles about British prehistory which provided the material for some outstanding contributions during our first decade. The explanation will emerge, we think, from the answer to a question: What is it that, in the last resort, determines the contents of a number of ANTIQUITY? It is not merely the Editor's personal interests, though naturally these must influence his decisions. The ultimate determining factor is rather the state of archaeology in any particular region. Archaeology is an art which employs a scientific technique, and like all arts it has periods of ebullience when (to quote the dictionary) new discoveries 'issue forth in agitation, like boiling water', and others when hardly a ripple disturbs the surface. We are certainly not in the latter stage, but has the water gone off the boil? Most certainly it has not. New discoveries of first-rate importance, such as the mesolithic habitation-site at Star Carr, continue to be made and are exploited by the most advanced techniques. The essential difference between now and two or three decades ago is surely that the blank periods in British prehistory have largely been filled in. The work of three or four prehistorians has enabled us to see in outline the changing scenes of life for some six or seven thousand years. There are still a few blank periods such as the later mesolithic and the Middle Bronze Age, but the others are now well established.



What remains therefore is the hardly less exciting task of employing new techniques, such as air-photography and radio-carbon dating, to amplify the picture and correct its outlines. The former, now 30 years old, is perhaps hardly quite new, but the conditions of its employment have delayed rapid progress. Thanks to an excellent cooperation between Cambridge University and the Royal Air Force a big blank on the map of Roman Britain is now being filled in. Nine years ago I forecast 'startling discoveries' in sw Scotland, quoting Tacitus' remark that in A.D. 82 Agricola 'manned with troops that part of Britain which faces Ireland' (*Topography of Roman Scotland*, 130). On the Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain that region has no Roman sites at all. Now Dr St. Joseph has begun to fill it in, and has published an excellent general résumé of his discoveries. Taking full advantage of the drought of 1949 he has

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found and photographed from the air a number of Roman forts and marching-camps in the valleys of the Nith and the Dee and carried the evidence of Roman military penetration as far west as Gatehouse of Fleet. It is now certain that the counties of Ayr and Wigtown must also contain Roman forts, for the advance would not have stopped short of the sea coast. By kind permission of the Editor and himself we reproduce here (*facing* p. 57) two of the air-photographs illustrating his article (*Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. XLI, 1951). One shows the plan of an entirely new fort at Glenlochar, Kirkcudbrightshire, with its triple ditches and streets; the other reveals in startling detail the interior buildings of an already known Roman fort at Beckfoot in Cumberland. Both are revealed by crop-marks, in the latter oats. In the middle of the latter photograph, beside the road, can be seen the stone barn with its buttresses. In all Dr St. Joseph has discovered 'six new large forts, nineteen small forts, eleven signal stations or turrets, about sixty temporary camps, detailed plans of several extramural settlements, as well as of five forts, while at almost every major site . . . air photography has contributed fresh information'. This is a record of which British archaeology may well be proud; here certainly is no lack of ebullience.



In excavation, too, Scotland has been very active, as the 6th Report of the Scottish Regional Group shows (copies of this and the next Report to be obtained from Mr R. W. Feachem, F.S.A., 3 South Bridge, Edinburgh 1, for 6d.). Much of it is done with student labour and served for training purposes. We have indeed travelled far from the times, nearly half a century ago, when Hadrian Allcroft lamented the neglect of our native sites. We have not come near to exhausting them, however, for as technique advances we are able to extract more and more information from each of them; indeed the time is ripe for the re-excavation of some of the more important ones, employing our newly acquired skill to amplify the older results. It would be well worth while thus to re-excavate some of Colt Hoare's barrows on Salisbury Plain. But as our knowledge of prehistoric and Romano-British archaeology increases and the blanks are filled, it is likely that excavations in Britain will tend more and more to become training-grounds for archaeologists whose major activities are destined for work elsewhere. The 'painstaking analysis of our ultimate prehistoric slums' is a good preparation for those who will proceed to uncover 'major civilizations and cultures of world-wide significance'. Egypt and India have already profited by such a training; the principles of excavation and field archaeology are the same in all continents.



But ANTIQUITY has also to consider the interests of a large circle of readers, some of whom are not particularly interested in British archaeology. Enthusiasm is infectious, and it may well be that the current enthusiasms of whole-time archaeologists make the most interesting reading. What is it that arouses such enthusiasm? Chiefly it is the opportunity of using the skill they have acquired by training in a region where it has not previously been employed. That always results in new discoveries, and it is the making of discoveries that is the salt of archaeology. To judge from the questions one is asked most people seem to imagine that the archaeologist spends his time going round looking at well-known sites! Actually it is the ones which are not known that attract him. Nothing is so boring as rubbernecking round ruins; nothing so exciting as to set out

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on a voyage of discovery in a region that has not previously been explored, knowing that all ahead is new and unknown.



These things being so, it is inevitable that some of the best copy should come from marginal areas in Africa and Asia. Africa is particularly ebullient at the moment from Khartoum to Cape Town, via Kenya and Angola. With a clear field and exciting new problems to solve some dozen or so enthusiasts are reconstructing the history of the human race in the continent where it may have originated. Others (including the writer) are concerned with fascinating by-ways such as the Southern Christian Kingdom on the Middle Nile, whose history is almost a blank. It is good news that the Commissioner for Archaeology in the Sudan, Mr Peter Shinnie, F.S.A., is starting a new periodical publication (to be called KUSH we believe) in which the many new discoveries made recently will be recorded. He himself has just completed the second and last season's work at Soba, the capital of the Southern Christian Kingdom of Alwa which came to an end (perhaps by gradual decay and abandonment) somewhere between 1317 and 1522.



In the older countries of Europe—older, that is, in archaeological experience—it is an age of maturity and achievement rather than of pioneering. Enough has now been done for big books to be written, summing up the evidence. Such is the fine work of Dr J. G. D. Clark which has just appeared (see p. 86 for full title). In keeping with the times it is concerned with the basic facts of prehistoric life. That in itself is evidence of the maturity of the discipline; the scaffolding is now discarded and we can see the building.



The Scottish Regional Group of the Council for British Archaeology is planning to bring into being an annual Summer School in Archaeology. The first session will be held in Dundee this year, from 8th to 12th August, and the subject chosen as a theme for the Session is 'The Problem of the Picts'. It is intended to hold the School in a different part of Scotland each year, the subject in each case being appropriate to the area selected. For example, the 1953 Session is planned for Dumfries, the theme being 'Roman and Native in Southwest Scotland', while in succeeding years other centres, such as Inverness, Perth or Glasgow will be chosen.

Particulars of the 1952 School may be had from the Hon. Secretary, Scottish Summer School in Archaeology, 3 South Bridge, Edinburgh, 1.