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METHODS & AIMS

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ARCHAEOLOGY

BY

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after all, civilisation started at much the same time all round the Mediterranean, but advanced rather sooner in Egypt than on the northern shores.

In this study of the facts which link together the early history of Europe with that of Egypt, we have now seen the varied sources and values of the different kinds of archaeological evidence; and the modes by which the accumulation of different evidences may reinforce the conclusions, and render them more exact.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ETHICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Individual rights.

AT first sight, ethics might not seem to have more to do with archaeology than with chemistry or astronomy. Yet even in those subjects an entire monopoly of some useful material, or the destruction of the only records of irreplaceable observations, would bring in serious questions of individual right. It is notorious what a large element of conduct is involved in biology, where species are being destroyed every year, where the rabbit and the thistle have been wantonly made the curse of a continent, and where a mixture is taking place which will efface the results of ages of segregation. In archaeology there is perhaps a greater range of ethical questions, of the individual *versus* the community, than in any other science. And the results of action are the more serious as the material is very limited, and perhaps no other chance of observation may ever occur. In most sciences the opportunity of experiment and observation is unlimited. If an alloy is spoiled it can be remade at once, if a star is not examined to-night it may be next night, if a plant is not grown this year it

may be next year. But Theodoric's gold armour once melted, we shall never know what it was like; the heads of the Parthenon statues once burnt to lime, are gone for ever; or the Turin papyrus once broken up, we can hardly hope ever to recover all the history it contained.

Destruction.

The destruction that has gone on, and is now going on continuously, seems as if it could leave scarcely anything for the information of future ages. Every year sees wiped out the remains which have lasted for thousands of years past. Now, in our own day, the antiquities of South Africa and of Central and South America have been destroyed as rapidly as they can be found. Elsewhere, engineers of every nation use up buildings as quarries or wreck them for the sake of temporary profit, or for more legitimate purposes as in the submersion of Philae and Nubia. Speculators, native and European, tear to pieces every tomb they can find in the East, and sell the few showy proceeds that have thus lost their meaning and their history. Governments set commissioners to look after things, who leave the antiquities to be plundered while they are living in useless ease. And the casual discoveries that are made perish in a ghastly manner. The Saxon regalia of Harold, the treasures of Thomas à Becket's shrine, the burial of Alfred, the burial of Theodoric, and the summer palace of Pekin, have within modern memory all gone the same way as the wonders that perished in the French sack of Rome or the Greek sack of Persia. However we may deplore this, our present consideration is destruction by archaeologists, and what their responsibilities

are in difficult situations. In all ages there has been destruction for gold and valuables, and in the Renascence a ruthless seizure of marbles and stone work. To that succeeded destruction for the sake of art, excavations in which everything was wrecked for the chance of finding a beautiful statue. Then in the last generation or two, inscriptions became valued, and temple sites in Greece and in Egypt, and palaces in Babylonia, have been turned over, and nothing saved except a stone or a tablet which was inscribed. At last a few people are beginning to see that history is far wider than any one of these former aims, and that, if ever we are to understand the past, every fragment from it must be studied and made to tell all it can.

But still there continues the plundering of sites in the interest of show museums, where display is thought of before knowledge, as is unhappily the case in many national collections. To secure an attractive specimen, a tomb will be wrecked, a wall destroyed, a temple dragged to pieces and its history lost, a cemetery cleared out with no record of its burials. And when carefully authenticated and recorded specimens reach museums, their fate is not yet a safe one, especially in local museums. Stones will be built into walls, and ruined by the damp bringing salt out; objects are left to drop to pieces from lack of chemical knowledge, or from the official dread of the responsibility of doing right instead of allowing wrong. Information is deliberately destroyed; labels are thrown away or heaped together out of the way in a glass case where the objects are artistically displayed, with no more history than if

they had come from a dealer. Groups of things, whose whole value consists in their collocation as they were found, are scattered up and down a museum as if they had no meaning. Or priceless antiquities will be left out for years of exposure to weather, as certain sculptures were in London, until at last they received worthy safeguarding in defiance of the Treasury. Unhappily far too many of those who are responsible for keeping the things which have at last reached a haven, need educating in the elements of their profession.

This leads to another difficult question, that of restoration. The horrible destruction which has gone on under that term is now somewhat recognised, after much, or most, of the original buildings of our ancestors have disappeared beneath scraping and recutting, so that we only possess a copy of what has been. And in museums till within the last few years, statues were so elaborately built up out of what was—or was not—to be had, that it is often a difficult preliminary study to set aside the shams. In the Louvre there is the honesty of stating how much has been added to the original; and the list is sometimes so long that it is hard to make out what gave the first idea to the restorer for building up his work. Yet in many cases some mere supports are needful, and the best museums now make such helps as distinct as possible from the original. The only full solution of the matter is the great extension of the use of casts; and the ideal museum of sculpture would have the originals untouched on one side of a gallery,

Restoration.

and the full restoration of casts of the same things on the other side.

When we stand face to face with a problem like that of the Forum at Rome there rise a multitude of questions which have intricate and far-reaching solutions. The removal of the latest of the pavements of the Forum has been bitterly resented. The Sacred Way is gone, and what is there for sentiment to dwell on! Yet who would reasonably prefer the Lower Empire to the Twelve Caesars? And then is not the Republic still more interesting and less known? And then the Kings hold a prerogative of glamour to every schoolboy; and what was Rome before the Kings? We see the inevitable result of such a crowd of interests, in the honeycomb of pits and planks and tunnels and iron girders which now bewilder the visitor, where formerly he walked down the Sacred Way and blessed his soul in romantic peace.

Sacrifices.

Now this elaborate treatment is most desirable, but is scarcely attainable unless there is a strong public interest, and a government willing to carry out proper conservation. Let us turn to a different set of conditions, as at the temple of Osiris at Abydos. There were more than a dozen different levels of building; all the lower ones only of mud brick; the whole of the lower levels under the high Nile, and certain to be a mud swamp so soon as the Nile rose next summer. To treat such a place like the Forum would have involved enormous iron substructure layer under layer, and a wide drying area for hundreds of yards around, at a cost of certainly five figures. No one would be likely to give

a hundredth of the cost to attain that end. If any part were left without clearing to the bottom, the next high Nile would make entire pudding of it. And so the permanent preservation of such a site was impossible. All that could be done whenever it was begun, was to dig it in as dry a season as possible, when the water was at its lowest; to clear it entirely to water level; and to make plans, levelling, and records, of every wall and every detail, removing everything that stood in the way of going lower. Henceforward that temple site, instead of existing in unseen layers of solid earth, exists only on paper.

Now here is a great responsibility. Whatever is not done in such an excavation can never be done. The site is gone for ever; and who knows what further interests and new points of research may be thought of in future, which ought to have received attention. Are we justified morally in thus destroying a temple site, a cemetery, a town, while we may feel certain that others would see more in it in future? If a site would continue untouched, and always equally open to research, it would be wrong to exhaust such places. But what are the conditions? In Egypt sites are continually passing under cultivation, and once cultivated no one would ever know more about them. They are being continually dug away for earth to spread on the fields, and all that lies in them is scattered and lost. The stonework is continually the prey of engineers and lime-burners. The Nile is always rising, so that every few centuries makes ground inaccessible that was previously out of water. And the probable

Responsibility.

movement of invention and appliances will most likely bring under cultivation in future most of the cemetery sites which are now bare desert. In the last few years most of the cemetery and temple sites of Nubia have been blotted out by the new lake for irrigation. Further, on any site of cemetery, temple, or town which is known to contain anything, the native will dig by night if he cannot do so by day, and will leave nothing but a wreck behind. It is sadly unlikely that there will be anything left to excavate in Egypt a century hence; all the known sites will be exhausted in twenty years more at the present rate. A thousand years hence—a trifle in the history of Egypt—people will look back on these present generations as the golden days when discoveries came thickly year by year, and when there was always something to be found. And therefore the best thing that can be done under all these conditions is to work with the fullest care and detail in recording, to publish everything fully, and to then trust the history of Egypt to a few hundred copies of books instead of to solid walls and hidden cemeteries. The destruction which is needful to attain knowledge is justified if the fullest knowledge is obtained by it, and if that is so safely recorded that it will not again be lost. The only test of right is the procuring the greatest amount of knowledge now and in future.

Here we are landed in a question on which very different positions are taken. What are the rights of the future? Why should we limit our action, or our immediate benefit or interest, for the sake of the future? If ever this

Rights of the future.

question comes into practical dealings, it does so in historical work. Any one who is above the immediate consideration of food and starvation, does consider the future. Our public buildings are preserved for the use of coming generations; our libraries and museums are largely for the benefit of those yet unborn. Was not the future of England the great charge, the inspiring aim of Alfred, of Edward I, of William III? Do we not even now spend ungrudgingly for the great future of our colonies? In every direction we unquestioningly assume that the future has its rights; that distant generations of our own flesh and blood are far more to us than present millions of other races; that the knowledge, the possessions, the aims, that we have inherited are but a trust to be passed on to the nation yet to be.

And to those who live not only in the present but also in past ages by insight and association, the transitory stewardship of things becomes the only view possible. In this generation I possess a gem, a scarab, a carving: it is almost indestructible, it may be lost for a time but will reappear again a thousand, five thousand, twenty thousand years hence in some one else's hands, and be again a delight and a revelation of past thought, as it is to-day. We have no right to destroy or suppress what happens just for the present to be in our power. To do so is to take the position of a Vandal in the sack of Rome.

The past also has its rights, though statues may be misappropriated and churches be "restored."

Rights of the past.

A work that has cost days, weeks, or years of toil has a right to existence. To murder a man a week before his time we call a

crime; what are we to call the murder of years of his labour? Or, without touching life, what difference is there between putting a man in prison for a year so that he cannot work, and destroying a year's work when it is done? If anything, the balance is in favour of preventing rather than destroying his work. Every monument we see has been lovingly intended, carefully carved, piously erected, in hopes that it would last. And who are we to defeat all that thought and labour? Every tablet, every little scarab, is a portion of life solidified;—so much will, so much labour, so much living reality. When we look closely into the work we seem almost to watch the hand that did it; this stone is a day, a week, of the life of some living man. I know his mind, his feeling, by what he has thought and done on this stone. I live with him in looking into his work, and admiring, and valuing it. Shall I then turn on him like a wild beast and kill so much of his life? Surely if we would draw back from wiping out a few years of the life of some man with whom we have no sympathies, far more should we shrink from even hurting the beautiful and cherished result of the life of a man whose mind we admire and honour in his work. I give my life to do so much work in it, and if I were to know that every night the work of the day would be annihilated, I had rather be relieved of the trouble of living. In all worth, in all realness, the life of past men preserved to us has rights as veritably as the life of present men.

The work of the archaeologist is to save lives; to go to some senseless mound of earth, some hidden cemetery, and thence bring into the comradeship of

man some portions of the lives of this sculptor, of that artist, of the other scribe; to make their labour familiar to us as a friend; to resuscitate them again, and make them to live in the thoughts, the imaginations, the longing, of living men and women; to place so much of their living personality current side by side with our own labours and our own thoughts. And has not the past its rights, as well as the present and the future?

What care then, what conscience, must be put into the work of preserving as much as possible of the past lives which those about us are wishing to know and to share in. The mummy of Rameses or of Thothmes, the portrait of the builder of the great pyramid (Fig. 65), or of the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Fig. 66) is a permanent mental possession of all cultivated mankind, as long as our literature shall last. The knowledge of the growth of the great civilisation of Egypt, from the days of men clad in goat-skins to the height of its power, has all been reconstructed in the past ten years, and will be part of the common stock of our knowledge of man, so long as civilisation continues.

Duties.

With the responsibilities before us of saving and caring for this past life of mankind, what must be our ethical view of the rights and duties of an archaeologist? Conservation must be his first duty, and where needful even destruction of the less important in order to conserve the more important. To uncover a monument, and leave it to perish by exposure or by plundering, to destroy thus what has lasted for thousands of years and might last for thousands to come, is a crime. Yet

it is the incessant failing of the thoughtless amateur, who knows nothing of the business; and far too often also the inexcusable malpractice of those who know better. To wantonly destroy a monument by cutting pieces out, whether to put them in a museum or to hide them in a pile of curiosities, is unjustifiable if the whole can be preserved entire. In the case of only fragments remaining, a selection often must be chosen; yet even then copies of the whole of the material should be made and published all together. To unearth whole tombs or chambers full of objects, whether in an Egyptian cemetery or a Roman camp, and neglect to record and publish the facts of the position or groups of the objects, should debar the inefficient explorer from ever touching such places again. To remove things without ascertaining all that is possible about their age, meaning, and connections, is as inexcusable as it is easy. To undertake excavating, and so take the responsibilities for preserving a multitude of delicate and valuable things, unless one is prepared to deal with them efficiently, both mechanically and chemically, is like undertaking a surgical operation in ignorance of anatomy. To turn over a site without making any plans, or recording the positions and relations of things, may be plundering, but it is not archaeology. To remove and preserve only the pretty and interesting pieces, and leave the rest behind unnoticed, and separated from what gave them a value and a meaning, proves the spirit of a dealer and not that of a scholar. To leave a site merely plundered, without any attempt to work out its history, to see the meaning of the remains found, or to publish

what may serve future students of the place or the subject, is to throw away the opportunities which have been snatched from those who might have used them properly.

To suppose that excavating—one of the affairs which needs the widest knowledge—can be taken up by persons who are ignorant of most or all of the technical requirements, is a fatuity which has led, and still leads, to the most miserable catastrophes. Far better let things lie a few centuries longer under the ground, if they can be let alone, than repeat the vandalisms of past ages without the excuse of being a barbarian.

We must always have regard to what may be the condition of sites and of knowledge five hundred or five thousand years hence. For if you will deal with thousands of years you must take thousands of years into account. If a site is certain to be destroyed by natural causes, or the cupidity of man, then an imperfect examination and a defective record of it is better than none. But to ensure the fullest knowledge, and the most complete preservation of things, in the long run, should be the real aim. To raid the whole of past ages, and put all that we think effective into museums, is only to ensure that such things will perish in course of time. A museum is only a temporary place. There is not one storehouse in the world that has lasted a couple of thousand years. Only two or three bronze statues have come down to us from classical times preserved by each generation. A few pieces of gold work have been treasured for a little over a thousand years, but only in North

Future of Museums.

Italy. And the whole of our present active clearance of things, that have hitherto lasted safe underground for six thousand years or more, practically ensures that they shall not last one thousand longer. The gold work will be the first thing to disappear, as it is even now disappearing every few years from museums into the melting-pot. And it is a serious question whether we are morally justified in thus ensuring its destruction by exposure. As a counsel of perfection I should like to see twenty electrotypes made of every bit of ancient gold and silver work, and these dispersed over all countries. It might then be considered whether it would not be a noble act to bury the whole of the gold where it would cost a national undertaking to recover it, say in a hundred fathoms of water, and so preserve it for future ages, when only a few wrecks of the electrotypes would have survived. The future of the rest of museum treasures cannot so certainly be anticipated. Bronze is sure to disappear in warfare sooner or later, especially as metals grow scarcer owing to exhaustion of mines. Ivories will probably vanish, like most fragile things, by mechanical damage. Pottery and vases will go the same way as the museum of Kertch, which was bashed to pieces by a disappointed European soldiery. Stone carving has a promise of longer life, especially if it is reused in buildings, and so saved from exposure and wear; for instance, whenever the Baptistry of Pisa may fall to pieces, a mine of Latin inscriptions will come to light. But, broadly speaking, there is no likelihood that the majority of things now in museums will yet be preserved anything like as long as they have