

CHAPTER I

GENERAL

The archaeologist's general aim on approaching a new site should be to draw from it all the knowledge that he can, to unearth as complete a skeleton as possible of the history of that particular spot during the period when it was a human habitation. Unless that period belongs to times when men wrote what can now be read, he can hardly hope to uncover perfect history, but the more complete the dry bones that he lays bare the better the chance that they will rise again as history when imagination shall have prophesied to them.

Therefore the excavator's sympathies should be as wide as possible, and nothing that he finds should meet with his neglect because it is not just what he is looking for. This sounds obvious and most unnecessary to be said, yet, to take but one instance of a breach of this rule, there are to-day archaeologists with well-known names who will dig a site only for its inscriptions, paying no attention to other and in their eyes lesser finds. This is a double crime, a crime against the actual neglected finds and a crime against the site and its possible treasures yet unfound. It should always be remembered that in general a site cannot be touched and left without irreparable damage, and that there can hardly be a worse sin for an excavator

than having attacked a site to leave the part begun unfinished. Yet this is likely to be the result of an interest that is insufficiently catholic.

It is a lesser evil, but I think generally a mistake, even to leave a separate part of a site for operations in the indefinite future, unless the circumstances are very favourable and there is definite reason to think the course beneficial. There are I think two reasons against it. In the first place, there is the great importance of establishing the relative positions of the things found and the fact that it is never very easy to settle accurately the relations between old and new. And secondly to begin a site and to leave it diminishes the potential interest of the part undug, and lessens the chances of the work's ever being finished unless a particular set of circumstances should again direct attention to the place. It is however only fair to mention one instance (Phylakopi in the island of Melos excavated 1896–1898 and again 1911) where this practice was in the result very beneficial. The circumstances were however particularly favourable, for it was a town site and the undug portion was neatly partitioned off by the walls of the houses. The advantages of the supplementary dig were due to the knowledge of Cretan pottery gained in the interval, which knowledge made the study of the finds easier. All the same had the first excavation been the ideal piece of work that we never hope to see there would have been no need of a second.

I am not, of course, arguing that an unproductive site should be dug to the bitter end.

That were to ask too much of human nature. Moreover in such a case the presumption would be that there is nothing there to be damaged by abandonment.

To resume, in theory nothing that is found is without interest and everything should be dealt with. For many facts that appear to have no interest at the time may become of first-rate importance in the future through the discovery of similar facts elsewhere. The same excavation of Phylakopi gives an example in the case of the so-called "Minyan" ware. At the time of the first excavation this ware was practically unknown and received a bare mention in the publication, though the results of the second excavation suggest that it must have been found in considerable quantities. This was no doubt due to its apparent inferiority of interest where so much was new and of first-rate importance. By a piece of good fortune the second excavation in 1911 was able to supplement the first, and to find out several points vital to the history of this ware, which but for this chance might have been lost entirely owing to the former omission to put them on record. I do not wish to say anything in disparagement of the treatment of the pottery at the earlier excavation, still less to appear to patronise it, but my comment on it will lead up to the next point that I wish to make. It was a very good piece of work indeed but it was not ideal (if it had been there would have been little need of the second excavation, notwithstanding the new knowledge of Cretan pottery acquired in the interval), and the chief reason

why it was not ideal was that there was too much material for one man to deal with really adequately. My impression of the whole of that first excavation, on which three seasons were spent, is that the excavators cleared too much of the town in the time, they went too fast and were swamped by their material.

The staff should be adequate and the work should not proceed too fast. Naturally these two factors, the speed of the work and the numbers of the staff, are interdependent. No excavation can be really well done if it is not possible to keep abreast of the finds, that is to say, to ascertain pretty well what is being found as the work proceeds.

It is to be hoped that the days are over when extensive digs were carried on by one or two men, the days when it was possible without shame and only partly in jest to say that one of the charms of winter work in the museum was the rediscovery of what had been found at the excavation—the days, in fine, when a spirit of madness was abroad that actually led men to adopt and act on the following creed: “Wherever it is feasible, the employment of large gangs of men is more economical and more conducive to accurate archaeological observation, than the employment of smaller numbers of men spread over a longer period of time. The manner, for instance, in which the various archaeological stratifications.....present themselves in rapid and organic succession to the eye of the student, when work is carried on on a large scale, adds a quality to the mode of observation which cannot readily be supplied when work

is less compressed in time.” The last sentence is perfectly true but the name of that quality is confusion.

I hope and believe that those days are over; yet many excavations must depend unfortunately too much on the support of public subscriptions, so that the temptation is strong to widen the scope of the work in order that the increased results may keep alive the interest of subscribers; on a productive site the tendency should be checked, because it will always lead to a passing of the limits beyond which the work loses in efficiency, will always lead in fact to the process known by the expressive name of “hogging.” The need of an adequate staff applies equally to the subsequent study of the finds in the museum. Every effort should be made to get such study and the publication of its results done as quickly as possible without loss of thoroughness. In the case of work depending for its support on public interest this is obvious common sense, but apart from that, loss of time means definite loss shown in the results, definite loss of knowledge. For in this imperfect world with the passage of time comes the mislaying and shifting of labels, and the most perfect notes become less intelligible when the memory of the context that should illumine them has faded. The initiated could point to several great excavations which are believed to have suffered much through being dealt with subsequently by too small a staff. All this, like most things connected with my subject, is common sense. Any work to be done efficiently needs an adequate staff. The too

frequent neglect of this point in past archaeology either points to personal selfishness in high places or merely goes to show that it was not yet recognised that there are two ways of conducting an excavation. Finally it is clear that the best way of ensuring enough helpers in the museum is to have enough on the dig; not only will their interest be engaged so that they will be eager to assist in the work of publication, but other things being equal that work will be better done by the men who saw all the conditions of the finding.

The last general principle to be mentioned has again no peculiar application to archaeology. It is the need for good organisation, necessary in arranging the actual work of digging and still more necessary in dealing with the finds.

For the excavator of a productive site is much in the position of a general in the field who is receiving a constant stream of fresh troops. In both cases the arrivals are very welcome, but without proper organisation the result is disastrous confusion.

Thus the man who means to undertake a dig should know the necessity of having an interest as catholic as possible, and besides a sense of duty to his finds, whether they happen to stir his interest or not, of realising the calls that the site will make on his resources, and of holding his hand if he feels that they will be such as in the future he may not be able to honour, of securing enough helpers both during and after the excavation, and lastly of never allowing his natural human eagerness to tempt him to go so fast as to risk the breakdown of his organisation.

CHAPTER II

PARTICULAR

A. *Digging.*

General principles it is easy enough to state, but the matter is not so simple when it comes to the particular question, By what means are objects best found and made to yield up their story? The answer comes in the form of another principle nearly as general as its predecessors. An excavation should be so conducted that it would be possible in theory to build up the site again with every object replaced exactly in its original position. For it is not until after excavation has disclosed fully what may be called the geological nature of the site, the original contours of the virgin soil, and the source and order of the subsequent accumulations, that reasoned conclusions can be formed as to the history of the objects found; and these conclusions cannot be formed, or at least cannot be formed with the same certainty, if the relations of the individual finds either with one another or with the geological conditions are not accurately known. Should the objects have been taken out in a higgledy-piggledy manner no subsequent knowledge of the history of the accumulations will be of much avail, and instead of

having evidence from stratification the student will be reduced to evidence from style. And this may mean that all that he can say with certainty about the site will be the fruit of his previous knowledge. I say that the student will be reduced to the evidence from style, using the verb deliberately as implying a natural inferiority inherent in that kind of evidence. As an excavator I wish to insist on this point because we are engaged in upsetting the old gods, and we still have to fight for our new creed; for as yet there have not been enough good stratified sites properly dug to carry its truth into universal acceptance. Men are conservative in their religions, and the habit of offering incense on the altar of style is of very old origin; since collectors existed long before the scientific excavator, and have long been forming conclusions about their possessions by the only means open to them; consequently the new truth has a formidable antagonist in the old habit of mind, particularly with those to whom the facts of an excavation are unfamiliar. It behoves me therefore to set it down as plainly as I can that, when the evidence from excavation, the evidence, that is, for the chronology of a set of objects founded on a mass of observations as to how they lay, comes as may happen into conflict with the views on the subject derived from a study of the style of those objects, by tracing their probable development from one stage to another with the support of wide-drawn analogies—when these two radically different kinds of evidence come into conflict the opposed forces are not equal; it is not

permitted us to say that the two discrepant witnesses exactly balance one another, so that we must reserve an open mind. The truth is that the two kinds of evidence are so far from balancing that the stylistic conclusions formed perhaps on *a priori* grounds and to a large extent subjective must be outweighed by those attested by the hard facts of observed stratification; for men may be mistaken in their views on the development of form and ornament, but to discredit in favour of these the evidence of a good piece of stratification observed by competent persons is to abandon the scientific attitude and to proclaim a real faith vigorous and impregnable before the assaults of reason.

I would not however be understood to give less than their value to the conclusions to be drawn from a wide study of style when better evidence is not to be had: I believe indeed that such a conflict as I have indicated would be rare, and that in most cases where excavation has been able to form a check the conclusions from both sources have been found to tally. Yet one such conflict can be found (if I may be allowed the egotism of calling attention to a piece of work in which I had a share), in two papers dealing with the "Cyrenaic" vases that are scattered through the museums of Europe¹. Both these papers attempted a chronological classification of the vases in question, and they will be found by the curious to differ widely. M. Dugas' paper was much the more skilful piece

¹ Dugas, *Rev. Arch.* 1907, Tom. IX, p. 403; Droop, *J. H. S.* xxx, p. 1.

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PARTICULAR

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of work, for he had nothing to go on but the sharpness of his eyesight and a wide knowledge of the development of vase-painting elsewhere; my classification, on the other hand, needed only an intimate acquaintance with one set of vases, namely the large and very well stratified mass of fragments of the same ceramic fabric that we were lucky enough to find at Sparta just after M. Dugas had written his paper; the whole history of the ware was there before me divided into its stages by the stratification, and all that I had to do with the vases known before was to slip each into its proper division. The reason for the breakdown of the argument from style in this case is not uninteresting. It was not then known that these vases were made in Laconia (the fact is not even yet universally admitted, but they were); consequently no one had thought of seeing in them the peculiar effects of the Spartan ideals. Yet we now know that in the eighth and early seventh centuries art showed as fair a blossom at Sparta as anywhere else in Greece, but began to wither there at the close of the seventh century under the blight of militarism. On the pottery the effect was that the style of drawing never passed the archaic stage; throughout the sixth century the work got progressively worse and more careless, and lacked the impulse to develop greater freedom so that it ended as archaic as it began; small wonder then that the most careful student of style being without the key should be deceived into placing very careless and archaic-looking work much earlier than is warranted by its fabric, which we now