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**CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO**


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**ARCHAEOLOGY IN INDIA\***

**T**HE report on the work of the Archaeological Survey of India, recently drawn up by Sir Leonard Woolley at the request of the Central Government, should prove extremely helpful to the advancement of knowledge of India's past history. . . .

It points out that "Archaeology could and should play a far more important part than it does in the life of the Indian people. In a country where the historical sense has been but little developed, where historical knowledge is very limited and is then confined for the most part to that political history in which the bias of party feeling tends rather to the perpetuation of old animosities than to the consciousness of national unity, the study of the growth of civilization is the most salutary of all studies. Especially for an Indian at the present time is it important that he should learn how the India which he knows has come into being, understand what is in the light of what has been, and in the clashes of race and creed should stress not the accidents of strife but the power of the Indian spirit to assimilate what was good, even in an enemy culture, without sacrificing its own individuality. Here archaeology can help and the Archaeological Survey as the official organ of archaeology has a duty to perform." This is the point of view from which the whole report has been prepared.

To achieve such ends far more attention needs to be paid to the interpretation of archaeological remains than is the case at present, a coherent plan of campaign for filling the largest and most serious of the many gaps in Indian archaeological history should have precedence over continuance of work on sites already comparatively well known, and publication of results needs to be so reorganized as to bring the Department into closer touch with the general public. These and the provision of adequate training are the fundamental recommendations made, but they all involve considerable modification of present practice, and the modifications needed are carefully considered.

. . . "Training and tuition are essential. Unwillingly but inevitably I have been forced to the conclusion that this cannot be got in and from the Department as at present constituted. In the matter of the

conservation of standing monuments the Department, following carefully the precedents laid down in the past, has done and is doing admirable work to which I can give unstinted praise; only where the preservation of excavated buildings is concerned, for which the precedents are more doubtful, have they indulged in an exaggerated policy which is wasteful financially and its results scientifically deplorable. In the matter of excavation I have on most sites which I have visited found that the methods employed were bad, trained observation conspicuous by its absence, and the results in consequence incomplete and untrustworthy. In the matter of museum direction the report of Messrs. Markham and Hargreaves is sufficient condemnation; the work is amateurish throughout and is seldom informed by any idea of the purposes which a museum should serve. If the present efforts of the Department can be so characterized it is manifest that the staff, before it can train others, must itself be trained. . . ."

On pp. 4-7 the most promising sites for immediate excavation are discussed, and it is pointed out in conclusion that before sites can be selected with really adequate knowledge "there is an enormous amount of preliminary work to be done. Assisted by Circle Officers the archaeological staff should from now on be busied in preparing an archaeological survey of the whole country. Sites of every kind should be visited, listed, mapped, and a carefully made selection of potsherds, coins, etc. collected from each should be filed for identification when the results of excavation make identification possible. I have ventured to recommend sites for excavation on the strength of the study of gazetteers, archaeological reports and such personal investigation as I have been able to make in the course of three months; but the Director-General ought to have at his disposal a detailed survey which would enable him to draw up a programme for future work calculated most surely and most economically to answer to the varying demands of advancing knowledge. Virtually nothing has yet been done in this direction. The task is one requiring organization and will not yield immediate results, for until the collections of pottery etc. can be assigned to their place in the type-sequence which only excavation can establish, the sites must remain undated; but the

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material will be there and the filed information will be of permanent value; but it is one which cannot be taken in hand too soon." The establishment of a pottery sequence—or it may be several such sequences for different parts of the country—is considered to be probably the most immediate need, for without it the dating of sites and of the various strata they reveal will in most cases remain impossible.

Another line that needs to be taken up at once is the investigation of Stone Age remains. "India is one of the richest countries in the world for remains of the earliest phases of man's existence.... The efforts of keen amateurs such as Foote only emphasized the importance of the problems to be solved; recently a foreign mission has done some pioneer work in the North-West; but it is not too much to say that this rich field has been entirely overlooked by the Archaeological Survey of India and remains unknown to science. The neglect of it by the Archaeological Survey is due to the fact that the study of Stone Age antiquities is highly specialized and lies quite outside the scope of the ordinary archaeologist; it requires a particular type of training, geological knowledge, etc. and no member of the Survey's staff is at all capable of dealing with it. For this very necessary branch of work to be undertaken specialists must be engaged, and so vast is the field that such should form a permanent element of the staff."

If anything like adequate attention is to be paid to the almost unlimited number of sites that seem likely to repay excavation the Archaeological Survey, even if much more liberally financed than at present, will need all the outside help it can get. It should co-operate with universities and museums, and do all in its power to attract expeditions from outside the country. But in doing so it must insist that nothing is excavated except directly under fully qualified expert supervision, and that the country's interests are adequately safeguarded in the matter of the removal of antiquities. In regard to the latter, evidence is given of the need for tightening up

existing practice in certain respects and for a much greater generosity in others, and amendments to the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act are suggested both in regard to these matters and to private ownership of and trading in antiquities (pp. 9–16). The most interesting and important objects should only be preserved on the site when, as at Sarnath near Benares, this is easily accessible from some important centre of population, never when it is inaccessible as at Nagarjunakonda. And it should be the aim of the Department to see that the various types of sculpture that have developed at various times in various parts of the country are well represented in museums, both in India and abroad, provided they will be safely preserved and properly utilized for public education. Only first class specimens can worthily represent India's achievements, and in their absence from foreign museums the country will not get a reasonable chance of receiving the appreciation it deserves.

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The report contains valuable suggestions some of which—such as wider co-operation with other institutions—had already been initiated by the present Director-General before it was written. It is to be hoped that its strong wording will not be allowed to interfere with the careful consideration that it obviously deserves, and that the Central Government will not fail to provide the funds necessary to initiate all such developments as this consideration may show to be desirable. India is so large a country that it is impossible to stop or even adequately check the destruction now going on of scattered megalithic antiquities, sculptures, etc. (most of them still unknown to investigators) by road menders, builders, amateur excavators, etc. And if the other alternative is adopted and all but the conservation side of the Department closed down for a time, much of the priceless evidence now available will inevitably have disappeared before it can be investigated and recorded.