From antiquarianism to archaeology

Stuart Piggott

The Establishment of Human Antiquity.
By Donald K. Grayson.
Academic: 1983. Pp.262. $27.50, £18.20.

IT has become a commonplace in histories of archaeology and evolutionary theory to point to the year 1859 as the moment at which, in England, the biological hypotheses of Darwin, and the archaeological and geological inferences drawn from the association of stone tools and an extinct fauna in the Somme gravels, coalesced to form a joint demonstration of the antiquity of man. But when the detailed history of the ideas involved is examined, as Grayson has now done, the two can be seen as almost coincidental, with neither dependent on the other, but accidentally published at the same time.

The study of the artifacts of extinct human societies which was to become archaeology, made a promising start in the late seventeenth century as part of the empirical and taxonomic approach to natural phenomena. Stone tools and weapons were separated from fossils and minerals, and accommodated in a model of the past based on ethnographic parallels as representing an ancient barbarian state of culture of unknown antiquity. From the 1720s however, interest waned as antiquities became regarded as ends in themselves rather than potential evidence from which to infer the nature of a prehistoric past.

No significant development, conceptual or in field technique, took place until the second half of the nineteenth century. In geology and palaeontology it was quite different; the principles of stratigraphy and sequential ordering were early established in a broad sense, though the complex microstratigraphy of Pleistocene and Holocene deposits where both natural and man-made agencies might be combined (as in inhabited caves) presented peculiar difficulties, as indeed they do today.

In France, Boucher de Perthes's discoveries of extinct animals and stone tools in open stratified deposits, published in 1847, met with an unfavourable reception from the scientific establishment: it is good to have in this book a detailed survey of the Continental scene with its jealousies and in-fighting between individuals and institutions. But in 1859 the classic Anglo-French meeting at Abbeville took place, between Boucher, two senior and distinguished English geologists, Joseph Prestwich and Hugh Falconer, and a young paper manufacturer in his mid-thirties who deserves the title of the first English archaeologist rather than antiquary, John Evans. Geology and archaeology combined in the alliance so long needed, and the antiquity of man could now be approached through these two disciplines, in parallel with the concept of biological evolution and comparative anatomy.

Wholly theoretical schemes of the extended development of human societies from savagery to civilization had been put forward in eighteenth century Scotland and France without reference to archaeological or geological evidence, and by 1848 the Danish Stone–Bronze–Iron Age technological sequence was available in English. Further synthesis was now inevitable, with the data against which models of the past could be tested, scientifically established. A "conflict of science and religion" at this time has been exaggerated and over-dramatized: as Grayson puts it "the biblical chronology as applied to the human species had become an issue that could no longer be compellingly addressed in a scientific fashion", and ceased to be relevant in a climate of opinion increasingly unfavourable to its acceptance. This book admirably surveys the complicated interaction of social, intellectual and emotional factors which brought such a climate into being. □

Stuart Piggott retired as Abercromby Professor of Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh in 1977.

The pen is mightier than the endoscope

Walter Gratzer

The Language of Medicine: Its Evolution, Structure, and Dynamics, 2nd Edn.
By John H. Dirckx.
Praeger: 1983. Pp.193. $22.95, £22.50.

A Treasury for Word Lovers.
By Morton S. Freeman.
ISI Press, Philadelphia: 1983. Pp.333. Hbk $19.95; pbk $14.95.

THE dust-jacket of Dr Dirckx's book induces a certain unease in the non-medical reader, for it bears a warm commendation from an organ called *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy,* and indeed the book fell open for me at a dissertation on patients' malapropisms, in which it is recorded that in France *hémorroïdes* are commonly transformed into *émeraudes,* or emeralds. (This brought to mind the fate of the Philistines, whom the Lord smote with a plague of emerods in their private parts: I believe the view of medical historians is not that the Philistines succumbed to an epidemic of piles, but rather that they were visited by the plague and that the emerods were buboes.)

Elsewhere Dr Dirckx (a practising doctor, who runs a university clinic and plies his stethoscope in Dayton, Ohio) descants in similar vein on euphemisms, and the successive strata of propriety with which they in turn are covered up. He recalls Don Quixote's instruction to Sancho Panza that he should eschew the vulgar "burp" (or *regoldar* in Spanish, from the Latin *regurgitare*) in favour of "eruct" (*erutar*). He tells us that the term *infarct* acquired its redundant *c* out of misplaced delicacy, and that the Italian term, which is classically correct, is *infarto* and the Spanish *infartación.*

But I should not give the impression that *The Language of Medicine* is scatological or even to any large extent gastrointestinal: it is in fact a sustained *tour de force* of polyglot erudition, written with style and relish, a constant pleasure to read and irresistible for browsing. You will discover, for instance, that *placebo* evolved from the text of a psalm (114), which concludes in the Vulgate: *"Placebo Domino in regione vivorum"* (I shall be pleasing unto the Lord in the land of the living), and introduces the Office for the Dead in the Latin rite. *Placebo* became a general expression for obsequiousness and servility, and in due course for a medicine designed to please more than cure. Dr Dirckx notes that *lavabo,* which also occurs in a psalm, acquired its modern meaning of lavatory by a parallel route. Or were you aware that the disrespectful use of the word *leech* to denote the medical man, rather than the worm, has a degree of etymological respectability (although Dr Dirckx questions its validity), for it was, it seems, in current use in Middle English and derives from the Anglo-Saxon *læce,* being mirrored in the modern Swedish *läkare,* meaning doctor? Well, neither I confess did I, nor yet that the Old English for the common leech, *Hirudo officinalis,* was *officinal;* this fell into disuse, Dr Dirckx conjectures, because subeditors of former days were no different from their descendants and tended to delete the *n* and transmute the word into one that they knew.

Dr Dirckx is no less compelling on the tensions between Anglo-Saxon and classical derivations than on the mutilation of the latter in modern times. He shows that the divide between technical and demotic linguistic usage endures today and has perhaps widened. Yet here and there technical terms have flowed back into the common language and enriched our vocabulary; *sibling* for example is a word long wanting in English (compare the German *Geschwister*), and I am sure I have seen a stripper referred to as an *ecdysiast.* Two earlier examples that occur in the book are *plethora* and *hectic,* both medical terms, discarded by the profession and left to journalists.

Dr Dirckx is not in favour of the kind of patriotic purge of classical derivations that occurred in Germany, where paediatrics is *Kinderheilkunde* (and for that matter a