

BOOK REVIEWS

Monumental Prehistory

The Chambered Tombs of Scotland. By Audrey Shore Henshall. Volume 2. Pp. 656+38 plates. (Edinburgh University: Edinburgh, 1972.) £15.

WITH the publication of volume 2 of *The Chambered Tombs of Scotland* Audrey Shore Henshall has brought to fruition nearly two decades of intensive survey and study. These tombs undoubtedly rank as the most numerous and impressive instances of early architecture in Britain: although some 5,000 years old, a number of them still stand virtually complete, and can be viewed today in a condition very close to that in which they were left by their makers, which is probably more than can be said for any Roman or Saxon structure in these islands.

The tombs discussed in this second volume, which covers western and southern Scotland, are two hundred in number. They are divided into three groups (Bargrennan, Clyde and Hebridean, plus long cairns), supplementing the six groups in northern and eastern Scotland discussed in volume 1. They are listed systematically by county, each with a plan (often by the author herself), with a full description and, where the gravegoods are preserved, with drawings of all the finds. This is undoubtedly one of the most monumental achievements in the whole field of British archaeology: it will still be an indispensable work of reference a century hence.

For the scholar today the interest does not lie solely in the great mass of data presented in the corpus. Miss Henshall's discussion of the origin and development of the tombs has been eagerly awaited, particularly because the full impact of radiocarbon dating has been felt since the publication of her first volume. The longer chronology now makes clear that many of these tombs are composite monuments, the result of several phases of construction and of reconstruction. This realization makes the question of origins a little clearer, and it is no longer necessary to seek a separate overseas origin for each of the nine groups identified. An early phase of building is now suggested in south-west Scotland, before 3000 BC, related no doubt to analogous developments in Ireland, with small rectangular burial chambers inside small cairns. In phase two the first passage graves—simple polygonal chambers with an entrance

passage—were built. The story from then on is one of increasing local elaboration culminating in the construction of the impressive tombs of Caithness and Orkney, where the masterpiece of Scottish neolithic architecture, Maes Howe, may reflect further contacts with Ireland.

Some elements of this sequence are hypothetical, but the important and progressive shift is to see these developments in essentially local terms, although not divorced from a broader European context. The way is now open for more sustained locational studies, rather than the detailed typological treatments which have sometimes in recent decades become too elaborate.

Miss Henshall rightly emphasizes that in nearly all cases the gravegoods found in these tombs relate only to the final phases of their use, often centuries after their original construction. In many areas we are left with the paradoxical situation that the only archaeological evidence from the makers of these impressive monuments lies in the tombs themselves, with no artefacts or indications of domestic settlement to supplement them. It is to be hoped that this is a situation which archaeology will eventually rectify. But meanwhile we are indeed fortunate that the tombs themselves are presented here so comprehensively. The Edinburgh University Press has again produced the volume very handsomely.

In his foreword to the first volume, Professor Stuart Piggott hailed "Miss Henshall's achievement . . . a major and outstanding contribution, of solid and enduring worth, to British prehistoric studies". The publication of the second volume confirms this verdict: it is surely the most substantial contribution made for several decades to the study of British prehistory.

COLIN RENFREW

Reptiles and Amphibians

Herpetology. By Kenneth R. Porter. Pp. xi+524. (W. B. Saunders: Philadelphia, London and Toronto, 1972.) £6.60; \$15.50.

PROFESSIONAL herpetologists have long despaired of there ever being published an authoritative text that would meet their needs. The high standard achieved by the contributors to the recently published volumes in the *Biology of the*

Reptilia and the informative *Life of the Reptiles* has gone a long way towards satisfying workers on that class of vertebrates but those concerned with amphibians still lacked any textbook more recent than Noble's 1931 *Biology of the Amphibia*. Kenneth Porter's *Herpetology* seems destined to be the book that has been hoped for. It has remarkably wide coverage and reflects organizing skill and a prodigious amount of labour in sifting the relevant literature, yet the mass of information is contained in a manageable size.

The contents include sections on origins and phylogeny with generous reference to palaeontological material and characterizations to family and sub-family level, zoogeography, moisture and temperature relations, colour change, feeding, isolating mechanisms, population dynamics and man's interactions with reptiles and amphibians; about two hundred pages are devoted to functional morphology and reproductive adaptations. A list of references follows each section.

The systematic treatment follows conservative lines and generally incorporates the arguments and the changes that have been presented by the leading workers in the field but surprising omissions are both McDowell's and Miller's convincing evidence that the Dibamidae and the Anelytropsidae are congeneric and Gasc's discussion of the family's affinities. But on the whole there are reasonably few errors of omission and the text is commendably free from typographical errors. The subject index would benefit from expansion: I had to engage in mental gymnastics tracking down topics such as the lateral line system and autotomy. Another minor defect that will no doubt be rectified in a second edition lies in the use of illustrations reproduced from books originally published many years ago with captions bearing out of date names that appear nowhere in Porter's text.

It is sobering to find in the section on leading centres and British herpetologists that the author rates highly only three workers, two of whom are dead. Despite liberal quotations from G. L. Underwood's and I. Griffiths's works, the British nationality of these authors is not acknowledged. But not even this slight can detract from the value and usefulness of this highly scholarly treatise which can be enthusiastically recommended to all who are interested in herpetology. A. G. C. GRANDISON