

From *The Enigma of Stonehenge*

occasional use of a wide-angle lens gives a sense of spaciousness which the monument itself belies, though one which echoes some of William Stukeley's engravings of 1740. Occasionally a Sun or Moon has been added by photomontage for dramatic emphasis at far more than natural size. Not the least haunting of these photographs capture, as none has before, the texture of the surface of some of the sarsen stones, in which each beholder will see his own private vision.

This book, in words and images, will enlarge the consciousness of every visitor to Stonehenge, past and future.

Colin Burgess's book will likewise extend the thinking of every British prehistorian, and of colleagues abroad. It is a major advance in the synthesis of the new evidence which has become available, almost explosively, from excavations and the analysis of museum collections during the past 20 years for the period of 3,000 years from 3,200 BC, which corresponds roughly to the use of Stonehenge.

He divides this into five periods, each identified by a type-site, and each characterized in his view by specific practices or trends, in ritual architecture for worship or burial, and in the design and manufacture of artefacts. This is a convenient chronological device for avoiding the constraints of ill-fitting radiocarbon dates with their present state of uncertainty. He gives also, however, a list of 215 radiocarbon dates in their raw (uncorrected) form. One may ask whether these, when corrected, may not provide a better framework than a series of largely arbitrary periods which, because they are new, may be adopted and maintained long after they have ceased to be significant. He rejects, rightly, the old and now outmoded divisions of the conventional Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Burgess's main thesis is that tribal territories had already been fixed by the end of the fourth millennium BC, and that thereafter cultural change took place by the adoption of innovations across persisting tribal boundaries, with local adaptations increasing in proportion to the distance from the primary source. This is a possible model, though the one which rests on a number of quite unverifiable assumptions, and one which rejects explicitly the "invasion hypothesis" that has long been dominant in explanations of British prehistory.

In his proper desire to emphasize cultural continuity, however, he has

perhaps underestimated the impact of the Beaker people coming from across the North Sea and the Channel in the middle of the third millennium BC. Whether this was an invasion, an incursion or an immigration, or a series of any of these processes, on whatever scale, is largely a semantic question. What is evident is that there was a fairly rapid innovation in material culture, superimposed on native practices which survived by absorption. This cannot be explained except by an incoming from abroad, and a break in the continuity of native traditions. Burgess does admit, quite rightly, that at the end of the "Age of Stonehenge" there may have been an influx of foreigners who established the succeeding "Age of Hill

Forts", though they are far less well represented in the archaeological record than the Beaker people.

This is a book for specialists in British prehistory, and not least for university students. It is well illustrated by photographs of sites and objects. The numerous line-drawings of plans and artefacts have been rather over-inked and thus harshly reproduced, and the inclusion of north-points and scales is a little capricious. Minor defects apart, it is a major contribution to the understanding of a formative period of our prehistoric past. □

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The rediscovery of ancient Ebla

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EBLA: An Empire Rediscovered. By Paolo Matthiae. Translated by C. Holme. Pp.237. (Hodder and Stoughton/Doubleday: 1980.) £12.95, \$14.95.

THE excavation in 1974 and 1975, at the north Syrian site of Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla, of a mid-third millennium palace with some 20,000 cuneiform tablets written in a previously unknown Semitic language was an event of outstanding importance for historians of early urban society in the Near East.

Prior to this discovery, archaeological and textual evidence for developments in Syria during the Early Bronze Age (c. 2900–2000 BC) was meagre. As compared with the earliest centres of civilization, Sumer and Egypt, relatively few Syrian excavations had penetrated below second millennium levels and of these most were stratigraphic sondages. At only a few major sites, mainly in the north-east, had more extensive excavation produced significant evidence of urban settlement. Literacy was attested only at Mari on the Euphrates where a Semitic language was written in the cuneiform script of Sumer. Of the population it could be said only that it was probably of mixed ethnic origin and that its social structure ranged from primitive nomadism to complex urbanism. It was, however, apparent that the urban civilization of Sumer, in existence by the second half of the fourth millennium, had

played a major role in the formation and subsequent development of Syrian civilization, the main impetus for the expansion of its influence being the need for the timber, stone and metal in which southern Iraq is deficient. As regards the political geography of Syria, a limited amount of information was provided by the records of Sumer, among the earliest being the campaign reports of Sargon and Naram-Sin of Agade (c. 24th and 23rd centuries BC) which list cities conquered on expeditions to the Mediterranean. Among them is Ebla.

This inadequate picture of the early culture and history of Syria is now being transformed by the excavations of Paolo Matthiae of Rome University at Tell Mardikh. In this report on their progress, he describes and assesses the significance of the finds made between 1964 and 1976. The site was occupied from the latter half of the fourth millennium until the sixteenth century BC, but work has so far been concentrated on the cities of the mid-third and early second millennia. Excavation of the latter has made a major contribution to knowledge of the architecture and art of that period, but of far greater importance are the unique discoveries in the earlier level.

Here was a major urban centre with central acropolis and lower town, perhaps covering some 56 ha, encircled by a defensive wall. Excavation has exposed part of an acropolis palace, including an

administrative block with archive rooms and magazines. The destruction of the building by fire preserved much of its contents: carved furniture, miniature sculpture, seals, decorative stone inlay, pottery and one of the largest collections of cuneiform tablets ever found. The great majority of these tablets are administrative and economic in content but there are also literary compositions, lexical texts, royal edicts and correspondence and treaties. Because of their number and the difficulties posed by the Eblaite language, it will be many years before their publication — entrusted to an international committee — is complete, but preliminary studies provide a foretaste of the rich harvest of information which will eventually be available on the population, economy, institutions, religion, literature and political history of the city.

Any reconstruction of the society and history of Ebla must at this stage be provisional. Matthiae's account, based on the textual evidence available when the 1977 Italian edition went to press, has to a certain extent been amplified and clarified by subsequent research, mainly in the field of linguistics. The population was predominantly but not exclusively Semitic and the closest connections of the Eblaite language are now considered to be with Akkadian, the speech of the Semitic element in the population of Sumer. A considerable amount of information is available on state and municipal administration but there remain many fundamental questions, answers to some of which may not be provided by the type of text found so far. For instance, was kingship hereditary or elective? What proportion of the population was in the service of the state, the temple or large land-owners and under what conditions?

Whether Ebla was the leading state of northern Syria and the centre of an extensive empire, as maintained by Matthiae, requires further investigation, but its conquests included Mari and it was in diplomatic contact with states as far east as the Tigris valley, notably Ashur with which it concluded a commercial treaty. Its far-reaching trading operations are documented by an archive dealing with the state-controlled export of woollen cloth. The destinations of the consignments are distributed over an area extending from Palestine to central Anatolia and from the Mediterranean to Ashur and Kish in northern Sumer. These names of towns and kingdoms provide much new information on political geography but although some are well known, such as Megiddo and Lachish, the majority cannot be located and there are numerous uncertain readings.

The civilization of Early Bronze Age Ebla was formed by the fusion of Syrian and Sumerian cultural traditions. The former are at present most evident in language, religion and architecture; the latter in the use of the cuneiform script, in

literature, art and certain administrative practices. The extent to which political and social institutions were influenced by those of Sumer is not yet clear. Until the lower levels of the site are investigated, the environmental and cultural factors which contributed to the rise of urban life at Ebla must remain a matter of speculation. However, archaic Sumerian elements in the political concepts and art of the palace period suggest that Sumer provided the initial stimulus, probably in the late fourth millennium when it had trading colonies in Syria.

It seems probable that the palace and its archive, which spans the reigns of five kings, was destroyed either by Sargon, founder of the Agade dynasty of Sumer, or by his grandson, Naram-Sin. According to one school of thought, the form of the script employed at Ebla requires the earlier dating. Matthiae prefers the later on the basis of certain artistic features.

The rediscovery of Ebla is of outstanding importance for the early history of civilization in the Near East. The texts and archaeological finds recovered from the palace have revealed the presence in northern Syria in the mid-third millennium of an established urban and literate Semitic society, as advanced as that of contemporary Sumer. The nature of the impact of Sumerian civilization on what was clearly a strong native cultural tradition can already be defined in considerable detail. The texts, when published, will illuminate the history not only of Ebla but also of the numerous states with which it had political and commercial contacts. The significance of the information obtained from Ebla cannot as yet be fully assessed but Matthiae indicates the areas in which it is to be sought. □

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The appeal of archaeology

Gail Kennedy

The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology. Edited by Andrew Sherratt. Pp.495. (Cambridge University Press: 1980.) £18.50, \$35.

THE goal of this handsomely produced volume is to "summarize the present state of knowledge over the whole field of archaeological inquiry". While *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology* does not quite achieve that somewhat quixotic goal, it does succeed to an impressive degree.

The overall value of the volume, however, rests as much with its clear presentation of the new directions taken by archaeologists since the 1960s, as with its summarization. In the past most books of this large-format genre have reflected



The art of Ebla: wooden figure of a king from Palace G.

the earlier emphasis of archaeologists on the exquisitely formed artefact or imaginatively recreated structure; such books have relied more on lavish illustrations and less on informative text. While this volume is indeed well illustrated, the emphasis is on maps and schematic diagrams rather than artefacts, which here are pictured simply and in black and white. The maps — of physical geography, migration patterns, political domains and urban or village street plans — are among the most beautiful and informative in print.

While the maps and diagrams will undoubtedly set a publishing standard for the future, the text is no less attractive and informative. It clearly reflects the trend among archaeologists away from the antiquarian-collector attitudes of the past and