

THE EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES ORGANISATION

The Egyptological achievements of the University Museum owed much to the generosity of Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. and to the professionalism of the Museum's Egyptological curators and field-directors. However, equally large is its debt to the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation (already referred to, p. 11) which is primarily responsible for safeguarding, maintaining and making accessible the ancient sites of Egypt and for promoting the study of them. The story of Egyptology, at this Museum or in general, cannot be properly understood without reference to the achievements of this organ of the Egyptian government.

The founding of the Antiquities Organisation (then known by a different name) in the 1850's occurred as a result of the desire of the independent Egyptian government of the Khedive Said to end the ransacking of Egyptian sites which had occurred in the earlier years of that century. This recognition of responsibility for any country's greatest cultural resource—its past—made Egypt a leader in this regard amongst Near Eastern countries, all of which developed their antiquities organizations at later dates. The strong and explicit legislative framework concerning antiquities is the fundamental support of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation.

During the last 125 years the Antiquities Organisation—which is these days responsible to the Minister of Education—has developed a large and impressive administrative system which spreads outward from its headquarters in Cairo through all the provinces, in which it is represented by its chief inspectors, supported by their inspectors, officials, guards and technicians. The Organisation's responsibilities include protecting all known sites from damage, conserving and restoring standing monuments, excavating sites which are of particular interest or are threatened by constructional or agricultural works, and expropriating (with suitable compensation) land upon which ancient remains are discovered. These tasks are often difficult and require considerable dedication, for many sites are located in

the more remote and rural parts of the country, where communications are still developing and conveniences, as yet, are few. The Organisation also greatly enhances the work of foreign expeditions, by assigning each an inspector to ensure that the standards of research desired by the government are maintained and to facilitate the expedition's work in many ways. Egypt is becoming increasingly richer in museums, not only the great treasure-houses in Cairo but also in the provinces—this in spite of the fact that it is the only Near Eastern country which still divides 'finds' with foreign excavating institutions, thus generously making available to communities throughout the world examples of the art and artifacts of its past.

The Antiquities Organisation is not simply a bureaucracy; like several of the Egyptian universities, it is also one of the leading contributors to Egyptological research. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries it is true that European domination of the Antiquities Service inhibited the development of indigenous Egyptology; as Ahmad Kamal, an early Egyptian Egyptologist said to a French Director-general of the Service who chided him on the absence of indigenous Egyptologists, in the years that 'you French have directed the Service, what opportunities have you given us?' In the twenties, the serious training of Egyptian Egyptologists began, and since then they have—in ever increasing numbers—emerged as equal to their scholarly peers in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Throughout the long period in which the Organisation has been in existence the Egyptians have maintained a traditional hospitality to foreign scholars and expeditions. Political vicissitudes of course have sometimes modified this hospitality; but usually, as is the case today, foreign scholars have received the salutation 'Ahlan wa Sahlan'—'Welcome!'—from this proud and generous people who have granted us the privilege of sharing with them the exploration of their unique and extraordinary past.