

THE BRITISH MUSEUM POLICY

The following abstract of an address by Sir Frederic Kenyon, Director of the British Museum, delivered before the Society of Hellenic Studies on May 10, 1921 and printed in the *JOURNAL* of that Society, Volume XLI, Part 2, is of special interest to all the readers of this *JOURNAL*. It is produced here by permission of the Society of Hellenic Studies.

It is clear that the Western nations have a very legitimate interest in the antiquities of the Near and Middle East, both as elements in the advance of knowledge in general, and particularly as monuments of the civilization on which their own is based. It is plain, also, that their interest in connexion with the administration of antiquities in the lands of which we are speaking lies, first, in the preservation and scientific investigation of these antiquities, so that no portion of their evidence or their significance may be lost; and next in having them placed where they can best be studied, and where they are accessible to the largest number of persons who can profit by the sight and examination of them. The vote of this interest would be in favour of the removal of antiquities from the country of origin just in proportion to the inaccessibility of that country from the centres of modern civilisation, and the absence of inhabitants capable of studying them and making their value known to the civilised world.

We have therefore three forces to take into account in framing a just Law of Antiquities in lands of archaeological importance: first, the material interests of the country of origin; secondly, the moral (or intellectual) interests of the country of origin; and, thirdly, the moral (or intellectual) interests of countries other than the country of origin, which may be more compendiously described as the advancement of knowledge. A settlement which ignores any of these claims will be defective, and it is the business of archaeologists and official administrators to endeavour to find a solution which will satisfy all of them to the fullest extent possible.

I do not think that a satisfactory solution is hard to find, if only intelligence and toleration could be presupposed among administrators and scholars. I believe it is possible to satisfy both the interests of the country of origin and the interests of other countries in the advancement of knowledge. But it seems necessary to repeat what to many, if not all, here are almost truisms, because we know by bitter experience that they are by no means always realised by those in whose hands important decisions lie.

In the first place, there are certain solutions which should be ruled out at once as incompatible with the principles which have been laid down. A law which prohibits all export of antiquities is only defensible—if at all—in countries which are able to make the fullest provision for their preservation, for their accessibility, and for their study. The best example, perhaps, is Greece. Greece is well aware of the moral, as well as the material, value of its antiquities; it makes good provision for their exploration and for their preservation; it permits excavation (though not exportation) by foreign scholars; and it is reasonably accessible to the nations most vitally interested in the study of these antiquities. Nevertheless I do not think it can be denied that the world would have been the sufferer if such a law of exclusion had always existed and been enforced. Greece has been and is the schoolmaster of the world because the products of its great age went abroad to Italy in the past and to Europe and America now; and although Greece may at times lament over its vanished treasures, the name of Greece stands higher, and even its political position is stronger, because the influence of its artistic genius has been spread throughout the civilised world.

A policy of exclusiveness is bad for the world, and bad for the country which practises it. How much does not Italy owe, in reputation and in the affection of other peoples, to the fact that its pictures have been spread broadcast in Europe and America? On the other hand, the artistic reputation of England has suffered because our artists are so poorly represented in the galleries of France and Italy. Except in rare isolated instances, I do not grudge the migration of English pictures to America; not merely because America has a right to a share in England's past, but because I believe that the increased appreciation of English art and literature adds strength to the bonds which unite England and America. What is needed is not exclusiveness, but an equitable balance between the claims of the mother country and of other lands.

And if exclusiveness is a doubtful policy in the case of countries like Greece and Italy, which possess trained scholars of unquestioned competence and educated publics which fully appreciate their artistic treasures, it is wholly bad in the case of less advanced countries. I enumerated just now three interests which have to be taken into account—the material interest of the country of origin, the moral and intellectual interest of the country of origin, and the advancement of learning. In the case of such countries as Egypt,

Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, two of these interests suffer by a policy of exclusion, and the third does not benefit. The material interest of the country of origin suffers; and consequently one invariably finds the natives, in whose interest the law of exclusion is supposed to be enforced, using all their ingenuity to evade it, and joining hands with the smuggler and the foreign agent against their own government. The interest of the advancement of learning suffers, because scientific exploration is discouraged, while smuggling, which obscures the history and significance of the objects found, is encouraged. Finally, for the moral and intellectual interest of the country of origin exclusiveness is not necessary, because there are in all these countries a supply of antiquities amply sufficient to meet the needs of the country and at the same time to supply a good representation of its art to lands outside.

The Palestine ordinance is of special importance, because it is the first to be drawn up for the territories recently liberated from Turkish rule, and is likely to serve as a model for the others. It is therefore satisfactory that it has been based upon, and in most respects conforms with, the recommendations of the Archaeological Joint Committee. The Committee, after consultation with the Director of Antiquities at Jerusalem, has suggested certain modifications in details, and there is reason to hope that they will be accepted. We trust that similar regulations will be enacted by our French friends in Syria. With regard to Asia Minor, it is impossible to speak with precision in the present indeterminate position of affairs. It may, however, be presumed that part of it will remain under Turkish administration, and possibly part under that of the Greeks. We are, I think, entitled to hope that the area which may be placed under Greek administration will be treated on the same principles as the areas which come by mandate under British or French control. The doctrine of exclusive ownership, which Greece is entitled to apply to the territory which belongs to it in full ownership, can hardly be claimed as applicable to territories of which it is, in effect if not in name, the mandatory.

In matters of archaeology, international jealousies should be ruled out. The civilisations of the ancient world are the common heritage of the modern nations. The fact that a European nation is administering a portion of Asia or Africa does not give it the right to exclude members of other nations from all share in the work of exploration or in the products of such exploration; and if any nation

were to claim such exclusive rights in the territories under its control, that should be a sufficient reason for refusing to allow it the privilege of working in the areas controlled by other nations. In Asia Minor, in Syria, in Palestine, in Mesopotamia, in Persia, in Egypt, there should be a fair field and no favour, and similar Laws of Antiquities should regulate exploration and excavation in each of them. So far as I have had communications with the representatives of the other nations concerned, I believe that this principle would be accepted by them; but it is important that it should be laid down clearly at the outset, and put into force without reserves or qualifications. We in this country, who have control in areas so important as Palestine and Mesopotamia, have the opportunity of setting a good example, and I trust and believe we shall make use of it. The only ground on which the exclusion of the representatives of any country could be justified would be if archaeological exploration were made a cloak for political designs; and this is only a particular case of the general principle that archaeology must not be made the cat's-paw of politics. It has been so sometimes in the past. Let us do what we can to guard against it in the future.

I have taken the opportunity given to me today to deal with principles of international archaeology which concern all civilised nations. I would conclude with a corollary which concerns ourselves alone. Our duty is not ended when we have thrown open the gates for international activities in the areas committed to our charge. It is likewise our duty to be foremost in undertaking such activities ourselves. It would be a shame to us if we permit other nations to do all the work in countries such as Palestine and Egypt and Mesopotamia, or if we failed to do our share in the further exploration of Greek lands. The times are difficult for all work which needs money, and our Government does not take the same view as other European Governments of the value to a nation of such contributions to knowledge and civilisation. All the more is it the duty of societies such as our own, on which falls the representation of our country in these spheres of activity, to take up the burden courageously, and to lose no opportunity of bringing home to others the greatness of the need, and the high privilege of assisting to enlarge the heritage of the past, and to increase the intellectual wealth of the human race.