

Notes and News

Chibcha textiles in the British Museum

PLATES XXXIV–XXXVIA

Professor Sylvia M. Broadbent, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside, has been delving into the 'Lost and Found Department' of the British Museum. She first had her interest aroused in a textile acquisition of the BM, stored with Darwin's Fuegian collections, by being shown a photograph, some 23 years ago, by the celebrated Americanist, Junius Bird. Clearly she was at once struck, with Archimedean exultation, by instant recognition of Chibcha textile. Indeed, as she related to the International Congress of Americanists in Manchester in 1982, and here has written for us, it turned out to be the largest and most significant known group of Chibcha textiles, which has provided the first substantial insight into the techniques of one of the most important crafts reported for the protohistoric Chibcha.

In 1962 or 1963, Junius Bird gave me a photograph of a textile in the British Museum, for which he was trying to establish some stylistic identification. According to the notes he gave me with it, dated 25 October 1950, it bore a tag with 'Tierra del Fuego' written on it and crossed out. It was thought possible that it had been collected by Darwin or others from the Beagle expedition, perhaps in Peru. It had both painted and woven decoration, and selvedge details unlike any Bird had seen on Peruvian pieces.

My immediate reaction to the photograph was, 'That's Chibcha'. Painted cotton textiles are often mentioned by 16th- and 17th-century sources concerning the Chibcha (or Muiska) of the central Colombian highlands, but few surviving specimens are known owing to the damp climate of the area. Textile fragments from the somewhat drier region of Mesa de los Santos are sometimes taken to represent Chibcha weaving, but that area was occupied historically by a separate group, the Guane. We therefore do not really know a great deal about what Chibcha fabrics looked like. The British Museum specimen was certainly richly-decorated enough to warrant the praise of Colonial Spanish accounts of Chibcha textiles, but it was really a stylistic impression that prompted my reaction.

The painted decoration is divided into oblong panels, some filled with anthropomorphic figures and others with repeating geometric designs. It was the figures that drew my attention. Although the plumed heads are round rather than the shield-shape characteristic of 'Classic Chibcha' figures on pots, gold, etc., the squatting pose of the figures, knees up, elbows on knees, hands raised, like a W on top of an M, was familiar from many gold figures and from wooden ones found in the Laguna de Fúquene. Moreover, in the space-fillers around the figures there were some highly characteristic details, particularly a sharp-beaked crested bird head and a long triangular plume-like element, which occur on painted pottery and incised stone-whorls from the Chibcha area. The crested bird head is, I think, particularly diagnostic.

In fact, I could think of a possible explanation for the British Museum's possession of this handsome object. In 1928, W. R. Dawson published a description of a Chibcha mummy in the British Museum, given by one R. Bunch Esq., a 19th-century British diplomat. It was said to have come from a cave in Gachancipá, a small town about 50 km north of Bogotá, 'with its cerements'. Dawson did not describe any textiles with the mummy. Perhaps, I thought, this unidentified painted textile was the remains of the missing 'cerements'.

In the summer of 1963, I was in Colombia, and there I met Marianne Cardale. I told her about the textile and what I thought about it. After she returned to Britain, she went to the BM and asked to see it. She took some notes, made drawings, and photographed details of the selvedge, all of which she was kind enough to send me. She found it had two labels attached to it; one had 'Peruvian' written on it, while the other, which she thought earlier, 'has Gachancipa written on it in ink, and a later addition in pencil dated 1939 says that nothing was known about how it got to the museum then.' The label was of yellowish card of the type commonly used to mark luggage.

Dr Cardale's report that the name 'Gachancipá' was indeed attached to the specimen seemed to me

to confirm my proposed identification of it beyond question. The name is Chibcha, and could not possibly occur anywhere else in the world. It is rather unlikely that the BM should have received more than one collection from that obscure municipality, the smallest in Colombia, and even less likely that it should get more than one lot with a large textile. It is also not very surprising that the name should not have meant anything to British Museum staff; the town is so tiny and unimportant that even in Bogotá people proverbially confuse it with the next town, Tocancipá, and cannot remember which is which. At all events, I was sufficiently satisfied with the identification and impressed with its decoration that I included it among a selection of ancient Columbian art works to illustrate an article for a volume edited by Gordon R. Willey (1974) in Propyläen Verlag's *Kunstgeschichte* series. The BM supplied an excellent colour photograph for this publication (although at first they had a little difficulty locating the specimen again!).

In 1975, I returned to Britain for the first time since 1947. By then, the Museum of Mankind had been set up to house and exhibit the BM's ethnographic collections, including materials such as the Colombian textile which seems to have been an archaeological find (but not from Europe or the Near East). Naturally, I went there, and with the aid of Elizabeth Carmichael I was at least able to see the textile for myself. It was everything I thought it was, except for one thing: the luggage label described by Dr Cardale was no longer with it! In 1977, I went back to London for a longer stay, and was able to devote some time to studying the textile and making measured drawings of it. I was aided by Miss Penny Bateman, of the Museum staff, who did some research herself on Museum records. She found, first, that in the registration records entitled 'BM Extracts', under the date of 12 Nov. 1842, there is indeed a record of the receipt of a mummy, a skull, and not one but six textiles from 'Gachansipa' [*sic*], presented by Robert Bunch, Esq. The first of the textiles is described as follows: 'Cotton cere-cloth: on it, pattern brown + blue. Gachansipa.' This seemed most likely to correspond to our specimen. The following four have dimensions given, which do not correspond to those of the textile in question. The last also lacks dimensions, but its description does not fit the painted textile. So the brown-and-blue patterned one seemed most likely. However, Miss Bateman was not quite satisfied that the identification was fully reliable

because the description was so vague and summary.

I also examined the mummy which had been described by Dawson, which was located without difficulty in the Museum's storage facilities on Orsman Road. With it was a luggage label of exactly the type described by Dr Cardale, with the following inscription:

1842. 11-12. 1. Mummy given by R. Bunch, Esq. (1842). Found in a cave, Sep. 1842, with 27 other mummies, most of which were destroyed by the Indians, near GACHANSIPA, in the Canton of LEIVA, about 29 miles from BOGOTA, N. GRANADA, COLOMBIA. (Together with this were 6 pieces of cotton cloth (cerements).)

Textile impressions were visible in several places on the mummy. At least some of them look very much like the double-warp, single-weft weave of the painted textile.

Mention of the canton of Leiva in this description was, and remains, a bit of a puzzle. Since independence, administrative divisions of Colombia have changed several times. Units like those now called *Departamentos* were at one time called *Cantones*. The town of Leiva, however, is far to the north, and it is hard to imagine that Gachancipá ever came into a unit of which it was capital. Possibly there was, in 1842, a unit named after General José Ramón de Leiva, who took part with Antonio Nariño in the battles for independence in the south of Colombia. I have not so far been able to locate information about administrative divisions of this date. It is also possible that Mr Bunch was slightly confused on the point.

In the summer of 1978, I was again in London briefly. At the Museum, Miss Bateman had been going through so-called 'Peruvian' textiles, and had located four bearing luggage tags marked 'Gachansipa'. Presumably, these are also from R. Bunch's collection, although it is difficult to be certain which of them corresponds to which entry in the BM Extracts registration records, owing to a lack of correspondence with the dimensions given. None has painted panels, but three have warp-float designs in border bands, like the painted textile. They also resemble it in weaving details to be described later.

In September 1978, Miss Bateman wrote to me to say that she had located another MS catalogue volume entitled *Acquisitions 1840-42, Ethnography*, which gave much more detailed descriptions of the Bunch collection and included an extract from Bunch's letter of presentation (she was

later able to find the original letter, dated 22 Oct. 1842). The first textile described is clearly none other than the painted textile:

... on it is a pattern painted in brown and blue the principal object in the pattern, is a head full face surrounded by rays perhaps intended for the Sun seated with the knees raised.—an ornament roughly resembling the Greek Meander, and a broad selvedge band worked in deeper brown ... Gachansipa.

This description made it possible to identify the original registration number for the specimen as 42.11.12.3. According to Bunch's letter, the mummy (and accompanying textiles) '... was discovered in the month of September of last year ...', i.e. in September 1841, not 1842 as on the luggage tag with the mummy. We can now be quite certain that this fine specimen, by far the best example of Chibcha weaving known to exist, is indeed one of those found in a cave in Gachancipá and given to the BM a year later by Robert Bunch, Esq.

I suppose the moral of the story is that in the best of museums it is possible for a specimen to get separated from its provenance data, especially where cataloguing methods of well over a century ago are involved. Incidentally, confusion about the provenance seems to have started almost immediately: documents located by Miss Bateman in the BM Director's Office archive dated November 1842, repeatedly refer to Mr Bunch's gift as a *Peruvian* mummy, perhaps reflecting a certain general vagueness about the names and location of Latin American countries whose independent existence was then relatively new. However, in the British Museum (and its offshoot branches, like the Museum of Mankind) the data *are* there somewhere, if the researcher is patient and persistent enough, and has some sort of clue to start off with.

Thanks to Miss Bateman's persistence, we now know of not just one fine Chibcha textile in the Museum of Mankind but five, and the sixth is probably there somewhere. None is complete, but they are much larger than the tiny fragments found elsewhere, usually preserved by contact with copper. As a group, they provide a much clearer picture of the textile industry of the Chibcha than we have had heretofore. All are woven of one-ply S-twist cotton in a basic plainweave, single wefts over double warp threads. Thread counts range from 6 to 12 wefts per cm, and 11 to 14 warps per cm: not remarkably fine, but tightly-woven and

sturdy. Very fortunately, all of them have at least one selvedge and one warp-end edge. At the selvedge, all show a very distinctive feature, noted by Bird and Dr Cardale as well as myself: weft threads turn in groups instead of singly, implying a multiple-shuttle weaving technique. On the painted textile, six shuttles seem to have been used. All the ends have a short (2–2.5 cm) fringe formed by the warp-end loops, which twist on themselves forming 4-ply Z-twists. The end of the weaving is secured by a row of chainstitch, using a 6-ply Z-twist cord, each stitch securing about 4 paired warps.

All of the specimens have warp-stripe border bands, about 10 to 20 cm wide, a few cm in from the selvedges, formed by groupings of warp threads of darker colour than the cream or off-white body of the cloth, usually in two shades of brown. It is difficult to tell whether these threads are dyed or are spun from naturally dark-coloured fibre. There is some sort of warp-float element in all these border bands. In one case they consist merely of 2 sets of 2 double warp threads in regular over-3 under-3 floats, forming two slightly raised lines or wales a couple of centimetres apart. The other specimens have, in the widest, central stripe of the border, quite elaborate figurative panels representing human figures, frogs, crested bird heads, interlocking spirals, and other characteristic Chibcha design elements. The warp-float patterns repeat in reverse colours on the other side of the cloth, so that both faces are equally presentable.

The smallest fragment consists of a portion of an exceptionally wide border band only, with selvedge and warp-end. The others show more or less of the body of the cloth. Only in the first specimen is this decorated with painted designs; the other three have warp-stripe patterns, brown strips about 1 cm wide and about 5 cm apart, with 2 or 4 fine dark-brown lines between them. The first textile, however, shows us just how elaborate the Chibcha painted cloths in fact were. Without going into details on the complexity of the layout and the patterns of repetition of elements, a few points may be noted. At least 3 colours of paint were used, which are now dark brown, light brown, and greenish-blue; perhaps originally the dark brown was black and the light brown more reddish. Of the anthropomorphic figures, no two are exactly alike; there is variation especially in the form in which the mouth is represented, in the plume-like fillers in the angles of arms and legs, in the number of fingers

and of plumes around the circular head. There is something very skull-like about these faces with their staring circular eyes and triangular nose-shapes, and the knees-up posture reminds one of the bundled-up mummy they are supposed to have enfolded; perhaps they do represent the dead rather than the living. Straight lines appear to have been applied with the aid of some kind of straight-edge, and the spacing of double lines is so consistent that it looks as if some kind of double-pointed pen-like instrument was used. There is no very clear relationship between the layout of painted panels and that of warp-float designs in the border bands.

As to dimensions, only the painted textile has both selvages, to give us a complete width: 1.37 m. Two of the others are complete in length, with both warp-ends; one is about 1.27 m long, the other about 1.63 m. Although the painted textile is not a complete length, the layout of the painted and warp-float designs makes it possible, assuming a symmetrical arrangement, to make a guess at the original length. At least two figures are possible: 1.84 m, assuming symmetry about the middle of the second row of vertical (i.e., parallel to selvedge) panels; or 2.40 m, assuming as a midpoint a line across the last remaining warp-float panel, after which the woven design appears to begin a mirror-image repeat of which unfortunately little more than a centimetre remains. While it must be regarded as quite speculative, I am inclined to think that this is actually the more probable original length.

By any reasonable standards, these are large, sturdy-woven textiles. Both the painted decoration and the warp-float designs are complex, competently executed, and attractive. If these specimens are at all representative of historic Chibcha textiles, and I see no reason to think otherwise, one can well understand why the Span-

iards seem to have been impressed by them. Textiles were evidently very important to the Chibcha. Besides wearing them and wrapping the dead in them, they used them as offerings, as prizes in ritual foot-races, and as ceremonial gifts when messages are exchanged between caciques. These uses suggest a strongly symbolic value, perhaps comparable to that reported by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978) among their surviving linguistic relatives, the Kogi of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, for whom the loom represents the universe and the textile on it the life of the weaver. After the Spanish conquest, tribute was collected mainly in cotton cloths or *mantas*. The encomenderos often seem to have preferred them to gold, probably because they did not have to pay the 'Royal Fifth' on them as they did on gold (Broadbent, 1981, 264). That, however, does not explain why a cotton *manta* seems to have been worth two woollen ones a hundred years or more after the conquest.

At the rate of one or two *mantas* per tribute-payer per year, the Spaniards must have collected many thousands of them every year. What they did with them all I do not know. It is not impossible that in some corner of a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century attic, in Tunja, Villa de Leiva, or perhaps Seville, there is still a mouldering pile of them lying undisturbed since they were collected by an encomendero or corregidor three or four hundred years ago. If such a store is ever discovered, we will be in a much better position to identify the fabrics for what they are, having the Bunch collection in the Museum of Mankind for comparison.

BROADBENT, S. M. 1981. The formation of peasant society in Central Colombia, *Ethnohistory*, 28(3), 259-77.

REICHEL-DOLMATOFF, G. 1978. The loom of life: a Kogi principle of integration, *J. Latin American Lore*, 4(1), 5-27.

WILLEY, G. R. 1974. *Propyläen Kunst Geschichte: das alte Amerika* (Berlin).

South Asian Archaeology 1985

The Eighth International Conference of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe was held in Aarhus, Denmark, from 1-5 July, 1985. Over a hundred participants came from nine West European countries, from Hungary and the USA, and from four South Asian Countries (India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). The papers ranged in time from the Lower Palaeolithic to the ethnographic present, and in space from Saudi Arabia east to Nepal, and from

central India north to Kashmir. Professor Norman Hammond sends us this account of the conference. While there was great diversity in the topics and approaches, three major series of papers were presented which substantially enlarged knowledge of the region from the beginnings of food production to the establishment of literate civilization. On the first day there was a focus on the Gulf region, and on work in Oman and the United Arab Emirates. A previous overestimate of the impact of



a

PLATE XXXVIA: CHIBCHA TEXTILES IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Detail of mummy showing textile impression

See pp. 202-5



b

PLATE XXXVIB: NEW EXCAVATIONS AT GAVRINIS

The bovid

See pp. 183-7

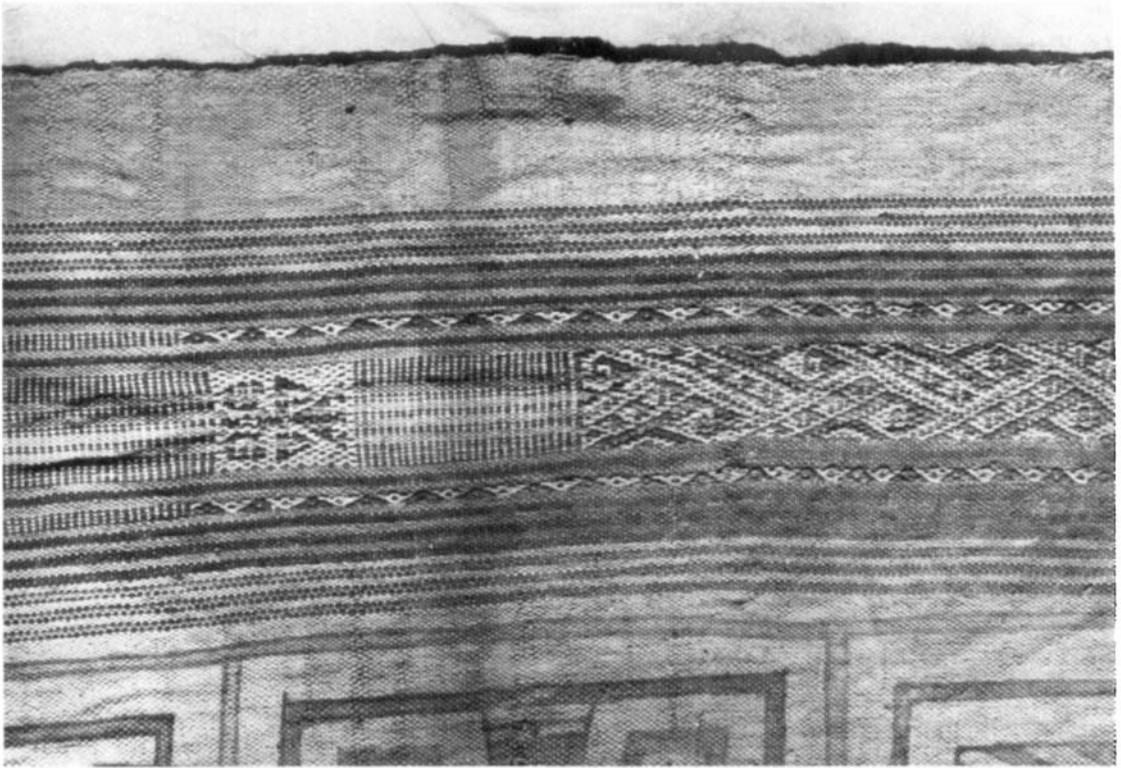
Photo: Author

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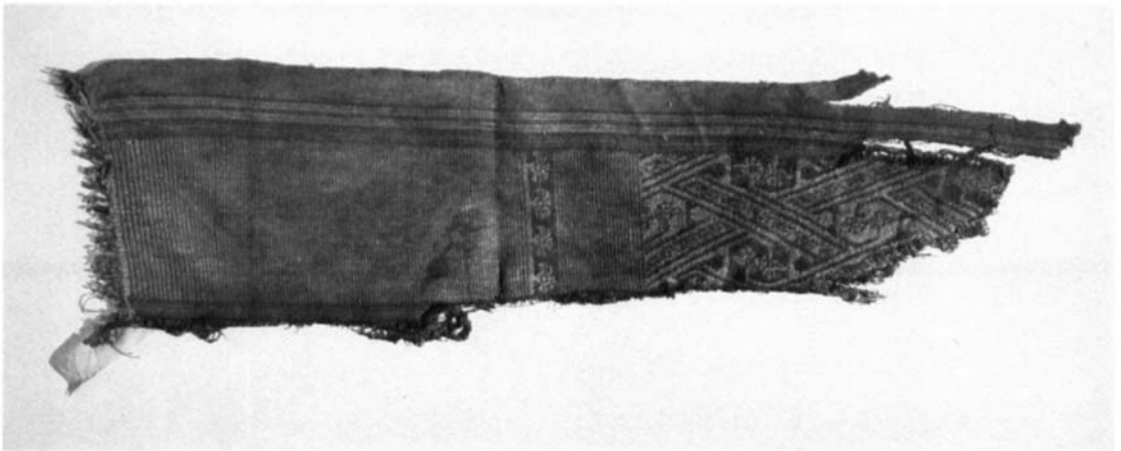
from BOGOTA, N. GRANADA,
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(cerements).)

PLATE XXXV: CHIBCHA TEXTILES IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

(a) Front, and (b) back of label attached to mummy



a



b

PLATE XXXIV: CHIBCHA TEXTILES IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

(a) Detail of selvedge and warp-float border of painted textile. (b) Fragment with warp-float border, selvedge and warp-end fringe

See pp. 202-5

Photos: British Museum

Mesopotamia in the lower Gulf has been replaced by a realization that from the late fourth millennium BC there was increasing contact with Iran and Baluchistan to the east. Harappan pottery of the third millennium has been found at almost every site investigated, and in Tomb 6 at Shimal (Ras-al-Khaimah, UAE) a second-millennium assemblage included an Harappan Jar and a cubical stone weight.

A second set of papers dealt with the important site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, where a sequence, from the beginnings of food production through the establishment of village settlement to the emergence of monumental architecture, has been elucidated by the French team under Jean-François Jarrige. Continuity in funerary practices has been observed between the sixth- and fourth-millennium cemeteries, but there were significant differences in demographic structure. The exploitation of animals also changed, with suids providing an increasing amount of meat from the fifth through the third millennia, and hunting of wild ass (*onager*) sometimes contributing up to a quarter of the animal remains. Analysis of charcoals from the third-millennium hearths has shown the use of tamarisk, juniper and poplar for fuel, while grapes are present from the fourth millennium onwards, indicating a more easterly early use of the vine than the presently known sites of Sitagroi and Tepe Yahya.

The third major contribution was from the German/Italian team under Michael Jansen and Maurisio Tosi who have been working at Mohenjodaro since 1979. Because of the moratorium on excavation imposed by the Pakistan authorities while a solution to the problem of preservation is sought, only surface mapping and collection was carried out, but the results have been spectacular. A proton-magnetometer survey has traced the southern and western edges of a massive mud-brick platform some 800 m long underlying the HR area

of the Lower Town, which seems to have been founded on a terrace left by an extinct channel of the Indus. Another similar platform seems to have underlain the Citadel. The use of low-level aerial photographs from a hot-air balloon, and the concordance of existing plans, has shown that different blocks of the city were laid out on varying orientations, internally consistent, which seem to have changed in response to an external magnetic or astronomical referent. Initial growth was along the main streets, with subsequent infill of the rear areas, but an overall control of the city layout from the beginning, with the commitment of massive resources for platform construction, seems to have existed.

Workshop areas have been defined on the basis of surface scatter in the southeastern quarter of the Lower Town; among the products were stoneware bangles, some inscribed in the Indus script, that had been fired at a temperature of 1050–1100 °C in closed kilns. The script was found on a number of seal impressions, and iconographic parallels in sealing designs suggest contact westwards across the Iranian Plateau to Shahr-i-Sokhta in Seistan and on to Mesopotamia, and also northwards to the Oxus and Central Asia. Neutron activation analyses of pottery of the Faiz Mohammed and Emir groups indicates that FM vessels were exported west from the Indus valley to Seistan.

The identification of a monumental core at Shahr-i-Sokhta, and of at least one large mud-brick supporting platform at Mehrgarh suggest that the conditions for the emergence of the Indus civilization existed over a large area of southwestern South Asia from the third millennium BC onwards. Further evidence from these projects, and from new ventures such as the Indo-French survey in Rajasthan, will doubtless be forthcoming at the Ninth Conference, to be held in Italy in July 1987.

Dr Plot, ring ditches and the fairies

In the course of working on his new book on the early English antiquaries, to which we all look forward with eager anticipation, Professor Stuart Piggott came across Dr Robert Plot's description and discussion of North Oxford cropmarks in Chapter I of his The natural history of Staffordshire (1686). We persuaded him to comment on this fascinating but hitherto forgotten piece of archaeological history. The presence of buried ancient features on the

gravel terraces around Oxford, visible by reason of the differential growth of vegetation in plough or pasture, has long been recognized. Such phenomena, mainly circles or rectilinear features, were recognized from the ground in the last century, by Stone at Standlake in the 1850s and by Haverfield in several areas in the 1890s. With the appreciation and use of archaeological air photography, and particularly the work of the late Major G. W. G.

Allen in the 1930s, the number of such sites has enormously multiplied (Allen, 1984; Benson & Miles, 1974). On the northernmost edge of the city itself, on Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common, the early results of Allen's photography were mapped on the ground by Atkinson, supplemented by small test excavations (Atkinson, 1942), and a recent study has much increased our knowledge of the extent and complexity of the features still preserved in grassland (Lambrick & McDonald, 1985). The dry summer of 1976 produced an unexpected group of such features visible (beneath the cricket pitch and two hockey fields) in the University Parks, less than a kilometre east of Port Meadow, on the other side of the present Woodstock and Banbury Roads (Wilson, 1982, pl. 39, p. 62; Daniel, 1983). We are here concerned more particularly with the most frequent type of marking, the ring-ditches, which excavation has shown to range from bronze age barrow ditches to iron age homestead enclosures, though the interpretation may be confused in meadow by rings of darker growth of grass caused by the characteristic subterranean growth pattern of fungi (including the edible mushroom). Atkinson demonstrated that a well-defined dark circle about 15 m diameter on one of Allen's photographs of Port Meadow could only be such a feature, now of course well known to all air photograph interpreters as a potential hazard.

The purpose of this note is to draw attention to a detailed description and discussion of the North Oxford cropmarks by no less a figure than Dr Robert Plot, first Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum from 1683 to 1690, Fellow of the Royal Society (and its Secretary 1682–84), and the author of the well known *Natural Histories* of Oxfordshire (1677) and Staffordshire (1686). That his disquisition seems to have escaped the notice of modern archaeologists is perhaps not surprising, since it is not in the Oxfordshire, but the Staffordshire volume, and is there contained in Chapter I, 'Of the Heavens and Air', because as we shall see, Plot had concluded that such cropmarks were mainly caused by strokes of lightning during thunderstorms (Plot, 1686, 9–19). He had seen circles from 'not above two yards *Diameter*', to larger rings, as at Handsworth and Purey Hall (now within the bounds of Birmingham), of up to 40 or 50 yards across, their 'Rims' 'seldom narrower than a *foot*, or much broader than a *yard*; some as bare as a path way in many parts of them, others of a *russet* singed colour (both of these having a *greener* grass in the middle

and a third sort seldom less than five or six yards *Diameter*, and the other two of various *Magnitudes*', and the circles were sometimes incomplete.

These circles not only occurred in Staffordshire, but were, Plot said, widely known: indeed 'having good opportunity in *New-Parks* near the City of Oxford, where there is always plenty of them', he made investigations described below, and they occurred 'not only in a *single*, but sometimes a *double* and *treble Circle* one within another', as he had been shown by a friend 'in the field between *St Giles's Church* near Oxon and the *Garden* called *Jericho*: they are also rarely seen of a *quadrangular* forme, encompassed with another larger of the *Circular* kind', as two more friends (like the first, and Plot himself, senior members of University College) had shown him 'in the same *St Giles's* fields'. *St Giles's* church lies immediately west of the Parks; further west the *Jericho* district of Oxford abuts on the southern end of Port Meadow. The dons of University, observant as they strolled in the meadows, bridged the gap, now built over, between the two surviving areas of ring ditches.

In the University Parks, Plot did some trial excavations to discover the nature of the mysterious rings—'I thought fit to examin the nature of the *Soile* under the *Rims* of them . . . and found by digging up several, that the ground under all of them, was much *looser* and *dryer* than ordinary, and the parts interspersed with a white *hoar* or *vinew* much like that in mouldy bread, of a musty rancid smell'. This is good Baconian, Royal Society, experiment and observation, so precise that we can immediately recognize what Plot could not, that he had in fact dug into fungus rings and encountered the characteristic mycelium of the matted fungal hyphae at their edge. But it gave him no clue, and after considering other possible natural causes such as 'the working of *Moldwarps*', the rain dripping from the eaves of round hay-stacks, or from cattle feeding in a sociable circle with 'their *dung* and *urin* falling always from them in due distance', he opts for strokes of lightning, illustrating his theory by pictures of alarmingly solid cones and pyramids of electrical discharges bursting from thunderclouds to form (when vertical) circular or square markings on the ground or (when oblique), incomplete rings.

So far we have rescued no more than a little piece of antiquarian fieldwork by seventeenth-century academics in North Oxford, and added an example of the early recognition of cropmarks as archaeolog-

ical indicators (cf. Fagan, 1959). But the observations just quoted occupy only a few paragraphs of Plot's text, coming at the end of his general disquisition on such phenomena, which begins five folio pages earlier in quite another manner, and illuminates the wider aspects of the complex intellectual setting of early antiquarianism in a fascinating manner. We move into a world of magic and demonology magisterially surveyed by Keith Thomas (Thomas, 1971) and (for hermetic magic) the late Dame Frances Yates (Yates, 1964), with a provocative essay by Lord Dacre on witchcraft (Trevor-Roper, 1969) and a sketchy review of Elizabethan fairies by K. M. Briggs (1959).

Plot's Section 17 of Chapter I opens with an arresting question:

And here perchance by the way it may be no great digression, to enquire into the nature and efficient cause of those *Rings* we find in the *grass*, which they commonly call *Fairy circles*: Whether they are caused by *Lightening?* or are indeed the *Rendezvouzes* of *Witches*, or the dancing places of those little *pygmy Spirits* they call *Elves* or *Fairys?*

This sentence is in fact lifted, without acknowledgement but almost verbatim, from the *Anti-dote against Atheisme* by Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, concerned with the magic and witchcraft in which he believed (More, 1655, 232): Plot has inserted the clause about lightning. This is an FRS writing in 1686, but in a very different frame of mind from the Baconian lifting of the turf of a fungus-ring in the Parks, and we hear the horns of elf-land faintly blowing down the Woodstock Road. 'Fairy Rings' have a long ancestry from Elizabethan times to yesterday, from William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613-16)

*Where fairies often did their measure tread
Which in the meadow made such circle green*

or, best known, in Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia* (1627):

*And in their courses make that Round
In Meadows, and in marshes found
Of them so call'd the Fayrie ground
Of which they have the keeping.*

And as late as 1719, when William Stukeley at Great Chesterford observed the crop-marks of the Roman town and at the Crown Inn 'over a pot and a pipe, fished out what I could' from the locals, they told him that they 'fancy the fairies dancing there causes the appearance' (Piggott, 1985, 52).

But the most important source, behind Plot and

More, is contained in that wonderful compendium of curious knowledge, *The anatomy of melancholy* by Robert Burton, which was first published in 1621 and, deservedly popular, went into eight editions, the last appearing only ten years before Plot was writing his *Staffordshire*. He does not quote Burton, but the latter, listing the prime causes of melancholy, very properly includes 'Terrestrial devils', among them 'Fairies, Robin Goodfellows'—

These are they that dance on Heaths and Greens, as *Lavater* thinks with *Tritemius*, and as *Olaus Magnus* adds, leave that green circle, which we commonly find in plain fields, which others hold to proceed from a Meteor falling, or some accidental rankness of the ground, so Nature sports her self (Burton, 1676, 29).

Burton's authorities are L. Lavater, *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght* (1572), J. Trithemius, *Steganographia* (1606), and Olaus Magnus, *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalis* (1558), and two interesting points emerge; falling meteors would include lightning, and the fairies are not the tiny, winsome, gossamer-winged nymphets of later sentimental fancy, but emissaries of Satan, and so to be directly associated with 'the *Rendezvouzes* of *Witches*'. A woodcut in Olaus Magnus of a fairy ring shows it peopled with cloven-hoofed devils, and the little black mannikins capering in what is labelled another 'Fairy Ring' in an illustration to R. Bovey, *Pandaemonium, or the Devil's Cloyster* (1684) are keeping very bad company with witches and the Prince of Darkness himself (Briggs, 1959, pl. opp.p.16 & frontis.)

'Now that *Wizards* and *Witches* have sometimes their field *Conventicles*, and that they dance in such *rings*, we have ample Testimony from divers good *Authors*,' Plot goes on, and launches into five pages of demonstration of this important point, fully documented from most of the standard Renaissance authors on witchcraft and demonology, notably Jean Bodin, *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers* (1580); Johann Weyer *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563) and the 1595 *Daemonolatreia* of Nicholas Rémy, a 'polite and scholarly witch-burner' (Trevor-Roper, 1969, 143). Plot concludes that 'though my faith be but weak in this matter' he must allow such a diabolical origin for 'some few of these rings': if we believe in good angels that 'converse with Mankind' we must equally accept omnipresent devils.

*Millions of spiritual creatures walk the Earth
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep
(Paradise Lost, IV, 677).*

The belief in witches and devils was still strong enough, at the end of the seventeenth century, to command credence and require discussion among scholars. To deny the bad would be to doubt the good. This was the haunting dilemma of the Church of England at this period, with the threat of the Catholic Counter-Reformation and all that it implied on the one hand, and on the other, the Deists who would deny all supernatural manifestations in favour of a natural, rational religion.

The forgotten chapter of Plot's *Staffordshire* beautifully illustrates an often forgotten fact in the history of science and of antiquarianism; there is no simplistic 'progress' and no separation is possible between the irrational and the rational, 'scientific' and 'non-scientific', in the intellectual climate of the early days of the study. Quite incompatible ideas could be held by the same man at the same time. Robert Plot was Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, and Elias Ashmole was a fervent alchemist and devotee of hermetic magic; in other more scientific studies, Robert Boyle might be a 'Sceptical Chymist' but was an active and devout churchman; so too the pious Isaac Newton, fanatically devoted to the mysteries of Biblical prophecy and eschatology. Plot was a man of his time, but no less interesting for that.

Always something new from Africa

Professor Thurstan Shaw, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, University of Ibadan, here reviews Dr David Phillipson's important book, African archaeology (Cambridge: University Press, 1985, 234 pp., £25.00; £9.95 paper) drawing upon his own wide knowledge and experience of Africa.

Over two thousand years ago Pliny reminded us of Africa's proverbial ability to produce something new. *Unde etiam vulgare Graeciae 'semper aliquid novi Africam adferre'*. (Whence it is commonly said among the Greeks that 'Africa always offers something new') *Historia Naturalis*, II, viii, 42. This characteristic has certainly been maintained in recent years in the realm of archaeology. Everyone is familiar with the astonishing post-war saga of 'the Early Man story' from Africa, but the revelations of archaeology concerning the history of the African peoples over the last four millennia, in many ways more important to the modern nations of Africa, are less well known. Nevertheless, so much evidence has been brought to light about these later periods that, although it makes for excitement, it also makes

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it difficult to grasp all that is now available. We should therefore be particularly grateful for having this evidence (together with a resumé of the early man story) competently and attractively put together within the covers of one book (Phillipson, 1985).

Such a book needs to be a masterpiece of synthesis and compression—and it is. To embrace the whole of African archaeology in 70,000 words is a task to daunt any but the boldest—and the most knowledgeable and well-read—especially in view of the enormous quantity of additional data which has accumulated in the last fifteen years since the publication of Desmond Clark's *The prehistory of Africa* (1970). That book devoted less than 5 per cent of its text to metal-using peoples, while the work under review spends 30 per cent of its space upon them—a much better balance; and it does a much better job on them than the unsatisfactory *Africa in the Iron Age* (Oliver & Fagan, 1975). Consequently every teacher and every student of African archaeology must be deeply indebted to

David Phillipson for writing this book; it will be tremendously useful.

Such an ambitious undertaking presents enormous problems; inevitably compression sometimes means over-simplification, and often brings problems of selection. What is to be the balance between data presentation and interpretation? On the whole the author has chosen to weight the balance in favour of the former, and has avoided incautious speculation; he presents archaeological findings rather than tells a story. This is more useful to scholars, even if less interesting for historians and general readers—although scholars will complain of the lack of page numbers in the references, sometimes requiring the reader to find for himself a short passage in a book of hundreds of pages.

Summarizing a vast quantity of other people's work is formidably difficult, and is necessarily a process of abstraction. Sometimes this means that, like a poor abstract of a research paper which gives the topic of the research but not its conclusions (Landes, 1966), a tantalizing hint is given which might have been made more concrete. For example, in speaking rather vaguely of the 'carefully controlled conditions' necessary for iron-smelting (p. 148), why not be specific and speak of the crucial necessity of a reducing atmosphere? In relation to South African rock art, speaking of the 'important place' which the eland occupied 'in the belief systems and symbolism' of the San, would it not have been possible to indicate briefly what this 'important place' was? The style of writing is clear and straightforward and avoids Binclark speak. Ambiguities are very rare: one which slipped under the author's guard occurs on p. 137 where, after saying of Ntereso that 'the cattle may be of a type antecedent to modern dwarf shorthorn breeds of Africa', he goes on 'Wild species were also represented'—when he must mean wild animals and not wild species of cattle.

A task of synthesis also involves a choice of stance—the point of view and the centre of interest from which the data are presented and interpreted. Here, it can be said that the author does not burden the reader with more technology than is necessary, as many earlier regional archaeologies were wont to do; he shows greater interest in the ecological dimension, but not a great deal in sociological process. He is more concerned with recounting 'events' than accounting for them: often this is not the author's fault, since the oft-recurring phrase 'for reasons as yet imperfectly understood' correctly

reflects the present state of knowledge on the topic in question. The Senegambian megaliths are briefly described (but not those of Bouar), but nothing is offered on why they are where they are, nor on what they might represent in social and economic terms.

One very welcome thing the author has done, and that is to get away from the technology-derived periodization of Early, Middle and Late Stone Age, Early and Late Iron Age. He deals with the difficulty of having to combine radiocarbon dates and historically-derived dates by speaking of 'about x years ago' in the earlier chapters, and in the later ones, after 5000 BC, by calibrating radiocarbon dates and giving all dates as BC or AD. This is quite a good solution, avoiding the bc and BC connotation, familiar to archaeologists but confusing to the general reader. The system used has the advantage of putting Egyptian events of the last three millennia BC on the same scale as the immediately preceding ones, and also on the same scale as those elsewhere in Africa. In considering the genesis of Egyptian literate civilization there is a good balance between seeing causal factors in indigenous development and in outside contact, although no suggestion is made as to the circumstances that triggered the beginnings of Egyptian writing as such. Although one wonders whether it is correct to describe the religion which preceded and succeeded Akhnaten's monotheism as 'pantheistic', in general the summary of ancient Egypt and its incorporation into the wider African story is done very successfully—so often Egypt is treated as if it did not belong to Africa.

Chapter 2 summarizes the emergence of man in Africa, with a greater emphasis on the fossils than on the behavioural progression and what 'becoming human' means. The beginning of regular tool-use is given its usual position of importance without (also as usual) its significance as energy-manipulation (Shaw, 1981a). The succeeding chapter, 'The consolidation of basic human skills', is a masterly digest of the evidence concerning the Acheulian, in a comparatively short space of writing. There is a commendable emphasis on using only evidence from stratified, dated and *in situ* deposits, and getting away from the old theoretical developmental stages based on morphology. In dealing with the technology of stone implements, the author makes extensive, perhaps rather uncritical, use of Grahame Clark's five 'modes' without fully explaining these when they are first introduced. (Later in the book, any reader unfamiliar with the

system may be confused as to why in sub-Saharan Africa we jump from Mode 3 to Mode 5). The formerly supposed developmental sequence of Oldowan—Developed Oldowan—Acheulian has now been stratigraphically disproved, so the 'origin' of the Acheulian remains as much a mystery as ever—together with the reasons for its remarkable uniformity in such a large area of the Old World over such a great length of time. The author favours regarding the 'Developed Oldowan' as one aspect within the Acheulian tradition.

Chapter 4, 'Regional Diversification', covers the enormous and immensely complex field of what used to be called the Middle and Late Stone Age industries of Africa. It is a most valuable summary, illustrating the wide range of variation, but doing justice to the details of stone industries cannot make for an absorbing story, except for those who happen to be interested in lithic technology. As the author himself says, it covers 'a bewildering mass of data of very varying quality'. Perhaps more emphasis could have been given to the 'hafting revolution', and to the possibility that the bow-and-arrow were invented in Africa—not mentioned in text or index. Because of the lack of stratified and dated finds, the 'Sangoan' remains an unsatisfactory category, and is regarded by the author as part of a continuum of variation within the later Acheulian. The variety within the old monolithic 'Wilton' is rightly emphasized. Those interested in lithics would have welcomed more description and illustration of the Charaman industry, a comparative newcomer to the terminology. In a number of areas patterns of transhumance and seasonal exploitation of different ecosystems are beginning to emerge. Innovative practices in food-procuring strategies are attributed to population pressures rather than the other way round—a controversial matter about which it may be unwise to generalize.

It seems that across the present area of the Sahara, from the Atlantic to the Nile, beginning in the seventh or eighth millennium BC, Africa evolved its own style of settled or semi-settled existence, based on the exploitation of the resources of permanent water—although Phillipson is right in saying that too much has been made out of the widespread occurrence of bone harpoons and 'wavy-line' pottery; this is correctly seen as a common adaptation to a common economic opportunity, rather than as a single uniform culture. This is certainly the better interpretation, but it still does not account for the presence of similar pottery over

such a vast area. Perhaps this was due to the practice of exogamy among neighbouring groups, who met annually for the exchange of brides, and among whom the women were the potters and water-carriers and the men the makers of tools and weapons.

Chapter 6, 'Early Farmers', opens with the statement that 'In Africa man has been exclusively a hunter-gatherer for more than 99 per cent of his existence.' It is unfortunate that the sentence suggests that Africa was different from most of the rest of the world in this respect, which is not the case; perhaps the words 'In Africa' are best omitted. Food-producing economies spread southwards in Africa as far as northern Tanzania over a period of 6,000 years among people who did not have the use of metal; these developments required greater adaptations and a greater innovative capacity than was required during the comparable process in Europe. This was because the neolithic populations of Europe had most of their domestic crops handed to them on a plate from southwest Asia: by contrast, Africans south of the Sahara had to domesticate their own wild tropical grasses, which they did, as well as a number of tubers, pulses and oil-seeds. For the purpose of this chapter, 'farmers' includes pastoralists and stock-raisers; although there were experiments in taming wild animals (such as the tethered giraffes shown on rock-engravings at Jebel Uweinat), the earliest of Africa's domesticated animals were introduced from outside: these were sheep and goats. Cattle may well have been indigenously domesticated in northern Africa or the Sahara area, not in the Nile valley. The whole story of the development of food-production in Africa is a fascinating one, although complex. Food-production appears to have been earlier in the Fayum, the Nile Delta and the Western Desert than in the Nile Valley proper. What is now known about the sites north of Khartoum shows how a single community may have had a base settlement but with outliers exploiting different ecological and seasonal environments; conclusions drawn from a single site could be misleading. Surprisingly, the book makes no mention of the rock art of Tibesti and the Hoggar.

Careful consideration is given to the question of the origin of iron-smelting in West Africa, attested there from the fifth or fourth century BC. Two alternatives are offered: a transmission southwards from North Africa across the Sahara, or an

independent invention arising out of the copper melting (not smelting) tradition in Niger and/or Mauretania; but the technical difficulties of the latter (Wheeler & Maddin, 1980, 124) are not mentioned. An objection to the former is raised on the grounds that we have no information about the iron-smelting furnaces used in Punic North Africa. This is not true, because the French excavations at Carthage have provided evidence both about furnaces and tuyères (Lancel, 1978). Anyone proposing an independent invention of iron-smelting has to answer Wertime's arguments (Wertime, 1973), and these are not referred to: not mentioned either is Andah's proposal to derive an independent invention of iron-smelting from pottery-firing within an enclosing wall of laterite blocks (Andah, 1979), but this has to meet the same objections.

In 1945 the Leakeys published examples of pottery associated with iron objects, slag and iron-smelting tuyères which Archdeacon Owen had found in the Kavirondo Gulf area of western Kenya; for years this pottery was well known as 'Dimple-based Ware'; later it was named Urewe ware, dated to the last few centuries BC, and recognized as the earliest element in an astonishingly widespread family of wares which, in a period of less than a thousand years, spread right down to the Transvaal and Natal. This spread was associated with the introduction of iron technologies into this vast area and was until recently referred to as 'the Early Iron Age'—for after about 1000 AD there were marked changes. In fact, Archdeacon Owen's discovery of Urewe ware in the early 40s was not the first find of pottery belonging to the Early Iron Age complex: Phillipson has drawn attention to the fact that a German called Weise excavated pottery now recognized as belonging to this complex from a rock shelter near Chifumbaze in Mozambique. He therefore proposes the name, by the rules of priority, of 'Chifumbaze complex' in place of the, in many ways, unsatisfactory 'Early Iron Age'. It has been difficult not to see the Chifumbaze complex as the archaeological manifestation of the spread of Bantu-speaking peoples, for whom linguists demand some such spread from the eastern Nigeria/Cameroun area. The dynamics of the Bantu expansion remain hidden, but a good ecological explanation is offered why such a rapid movement came to an end—along a boundary formed by the southwest African zone of desert vegetation, the long-grass veldt of the Orange Free State, Drakensberg and Cape winter rainfall area.

The development of state systems and centralized patterns of social control, together with the florescence of indigenous art these gave rise to, form the most important topics after AD 1000. Perhaps too great emphasis is placed on long-distance trade in the creation of the sudanic states of early Ghana, Mali and Songhai, even though the place of local exchange networks is mentioned; less justice is done to the significance of the McIntosh's work at Jenne-Jeno, where there was a walled town by AD 800. Nor is consideration given to the relationship between religious and agricultural practices in processes of centralization: this applies particularly to Ife and Great Zimbabwe (Wheatley, 1971; Shaw, 1981b).

The format of the book is attractive: good print, well chosen, and on the whole well produced, illustrations, a moderately good index. The bibliography has obviously had to be selective, like everything else, but contains some 500 items—although Harlan 1982, referred to on p. 113, is not included; and the Dombrowski reference on p. 138 for Davies's 'carved wooden mouldings' from Ntereso (Davies, 1967) in fact makes no mention of them; presumably this means that, since she has a paragraph in the reference to the art of the Kintampo culture, she rejects them—as does this reviewer. For a book so crammed with archaeological data, the paperback edition is particularly good value at today's prices. The diagram in Fig. 2.2 is confusing, making it appear at first glance that, for example, the apes are classified among the Hominidae; and there could be some improvement in some of the maps, particularly to show environmental features. Nowhere are the all-important vegetation zones shown, except for the equatorial forest in Fig. 1.1, where the only other feature shown is land over 1,000 m; it would have been even more telling to have vegetation maps at the time of the last great aridity and of the moistest phase in the Sahara, to compare with the present and to relate to human activity at those times. The maps are beautifully clear, but one wonders whether considerable space is not wasted in some of them. The 'chariot routes' map (Fig. 7.3) oversimplifies the situation, as indeed does the text on this topic, since the engravings of chariots are more widespread than the map suggests; and the said chariots are more likely to have been the prestige symbols of local chieftains than the vehicles of long-distance trade; the Saharan chariot was more like a Rolls Royce than a twenty-ton lorry. On pp.

131-3 it is confusing for those not familiar with the situation to refer to roughly the same area as 'the eastern Sahara' and 'the Western Desert'.

The important source of information about the past of Africa provided by linguistic studies is emphasized in the Introduction, and useful summaries of this type of data are given, especially in relation to the later periods and the spread of food-producing practices. It would have been interesting to have some suggestions concerning the pattern of ancestral languages in earlier periods. On the genetic composition of earlier Holocene populations, the important point is made that the archaeological evidence suggests that they were already as varied and as mixed as they are today. Since genetic stocks and language groups are not to be equated, is it being pedantic to ask that linguistic and genetic terms should be kept separate, and that we should not speak of 'Nilotic negroids' and 'Khoisan stock'? Skeletons from the East African Pastoral Neolithic, whose supposedly 'Caucasian' affinities were formerly stressed, have more recently been shown to belong to the 'long negroid' group and to have characteristics that would not be out of place in modern African populations in the eastern part of Middle Africa.

In the context of world prehistory, a number of important points emerge from this survey of Africa's past, quite apart from the now generally accepted claim that the continent is the most likely 'cradle of mankind'. Microlithic technology is now attested in southern Africa at a date earlier than in any other part of the world; not only is it significantly older than the European or Asian blade industries, but it is apparently associated with the oldest fossils so far known which may con-

fidently be attributed to fully modern man, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The bow-and-arrow may well be an African invention. The rock art at the Apollo 11 Cave in Namibia, at 23,000 years old, has an antiquity comparable with that of Europe. Pottery appears to be older in the Saharan area between the Atlantic and the Nile than it was in Europe.

In a work which sweeps across a whole continent, perhaps it is too easy, and possibly unfair, for regional specialists to point to what they regard as omissions or wrong emphases; such comments should not detract from the overall value of the book nor from the achievement of the author.

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A neolithic enclosure at Grendon, Northants

The author of this note, Alex Gibson, is a part-time lecturer at the University of Leicester, interested mainly in Beaker domestic pottery (BAR 107); we have published contributions from him before in 1980 and 1982, on potbeakers and on a dating programme for British Beakers. His note below, which we are delighted to have, shows us that the air survey of the Nene Valley near Peterborough has revealed astonishing new information about our pre-Roman past.

In 1974-5 a series of ring ditches and an iron age farm were excavated at Grendon in the Nene Valley. The sites were situated on a gravel penin-

sula in the floodplain of the river and were threatened by gravel extraction. During the writing up of the excavations it became clear that within one of the ring ditches was a new type of neolithic monument finding its best parallels amongst the long barrows, but in the case of Grendon the barrow is square.

The Grendon complex was discovered by aerial photography and the square enclosure was visible on only some of the photographs situated within the most northern of seven ring ditches (FIG. 1). Owing to the lack of available time and the poor excavation conditions in advance of the immediate gravel