MARGINALIZING EGYPTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO CIVILIZATION THE CASE OF SIR LEONARD WOOLLEY

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The area of historical explanation and interpretation is generally accepted as one of the points of contact between philosophy and history. The philosopher of history is interested among other things in the objective presentation of historical facts, in the subsequent interpretations or explanations of those facts and in some of the social theories built around these historical facts and their interpretations. When therefore a world body like the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, sets out to commission a *History of Mankind*, that aims specifically at an interpretative account of man's *Cultural and Scientific Development*[1], there is every reason for the philosopher of history to expect something different from other accounts of man's past. The foreword makes this clear by insisting on the fact that "it adopts ... intellectual approach - that of the interpretative as opposed to the descriptive historian ..."[2] Some interpretative accounts could be very subjective, and this should be avoided in a major work.

A good way therefore to start an interpretative account of mankind's cultural and scientific development is to call it a history of civilization, after which it becomes necessary to define civilization itself and fix a period when it could be said civilization started. In the Author's Preface to "The Beginnings of Civilization,"[3] which forms Part Two of Volume One of *History of Mankind*, Sir Leonard Woolley having decided that civilization started with the Bronze Age, sets out to define civilization. Besides the need for the clarification of a key word, Sir Woolley would seem to have other pressing needs, among them, the exclusion of certain areas of the world from the strict notion of civilization: "This is the more necessary because the term has too often been loosely used of cultures which, while remaining essentially primitive, have developed arts and

aptitudes that invite comparison with the achievements of more advanced peoples. Some criterion is obviously needed to fix the distinction between them." (HM. I. p. 359). We shall see later that the exclusion of some people from certain "achievements" forms a constant feature of Sir Woolley's account. This preoccupation sometimes seems more important to him than the attempt at objectivity.

As for the definition of civilization itself, Sir Woolley recognizes that the word "by its etymology implies an urbanized society," (HM. I. p. 359). But then he fails to go further into the etymological analysis of either civilization or urbanization (both of which are Latin in origin). He considers urbanization "insufficient as a definition of anything else." This is rather paradoxical if not unfortunate. The words civilization and urbanization derive from two groups of related Latin words that point to a particular physical environment, a communal existence, and to a social attribute/disposition, that of refinement. These two characteristics, the one external and the other internal, together constitute the essence of civilization. The Latin noun *civitas*, *civitatis* means "citizenship", "a state", "a town" or "a city". *Civis*, *civis* means a "citizen", a "fellow citizen". The adjective *civilis*, *civile* means "relating to a citizen", "civic", "civil". Another Latin noun *urbs*, *urbis* also means the "city". *Urbanitas*, *urbanitatis* means the "city life", the "city manner", "politeness", "refinement", "elegance". Etymologically therefore, the citizen in the sense of a city-dweller, is suave, urbane, in short civilized. Here being civilized incorporates the idea of a social structure "an urbanized society" and that of an inward disposition or attribute of the city-dweller, refinement. It is the latter component rather than the former which is primary.

It is indeed paradoxical as well as unfortunate, that more often than not, especially in the Western world's conceptions of civilization, this internal component, the civilized behaviour of the city-dweller/citizen is ignored while so much attention is paid to the physical structure of the city and its organisation. When contrasted with the civilized, urban life of the city-dweller, the country-dweller, the rustic, despite his good will, is crude, unrefined and awkward. The Latin noun *rus*, *ruris* means "the

country-side". The adjective *rusticanus*, *rusticana*, *rusticanum* means "relating to the country", "rustic". The adverb *rustice* means "in a rustic manner", "awkwardly". The difference between the city-dweller and the fellow from the country-side goes beyond the contrast between the polished manners of the former and the rather vulgar ways of the latter. The citizen as the city-dweller by the mere fact of living in an urban environment is first and foremost restrained, self-possessed and then in addition, is social, polite, considerate, conscious of others in a healthy sense, and before the advent of the contemporary callous metropolitan whose indifference is so often deplored by the existentialists. Before the degeneration, man had always felt the need for urbanized existence as a means of survival and a condition for human fulfilment. In ancient Greece of Heraclitus and then more explicitly of Aristotle, the city-dweller was seen as constituted in his very being by the attribute of sociability. The inhabitant of the city, which was also the state, had to be equipped with *Logos* - language - in the triple sense of the capacity to speak a language, any language; the spoken language itself and the content of speech. He had to be equipped also with *nomos*, law, as a unifying principle for all in the city. Both factors, *logos* and *nomos*, language and law, have always been found to be necessary for a communal life, for urbanized existence, for civilization.
It appears paradoxical that Sir Woolley or anybody for that matter, would decide to ignore these etymological considerations.

At a very significant stage in the recording of human civilization and of defining that civilization, for anybody to reject or ignore the notion of urbanization as a crucial factor in the definition of civilization is unthinkable. Besides, in her Introduction to "Prehistory", which forms Part One of the same Volume One, Jacquetta Hawkes concludes that "man is not quite man without at least the possibility of an artificial roof over his head." (HM. I. p. 346). One would have expected that the hint dropped here about the link between man being man at all and man constructing "an artificial roof over his head", would have led Sir Woolley in the direction of incorporating urbanization in the definition of civilization.

The failure to take account of these obvious connections must be considered a deliberate act of omission, which would seem to suggest a

deep preoccupation on the part of Sir Woolley with something other than the mere conceptual analysis of civilization. This would explain why he abruptly, without further argument or analysis, and in the middle of a sentence, declares the art of writing the best and clearest indication of civilization: "the most convenient and easily recognisable criterion of civilization is the knowledge of the art of writing." (HM. I. p. 359). He is influenced by Professor Gordon Childe, according to whom the art of writing is "symptomatic of a quite novel socio-economic structure - the city."[4] Sir Woolley, who earlier considered urbanization "insufficient as a definition of anything else", is now forced to offer a definition of the city. He returns to Professor Childe, not for a definition of the city, but for a description of the general characteristics of the city. In English language, according to Professor Childe the term city "implies a cathedral, a bishop's palace, a body of canons and other clergy, and a large number of laymen who are neither farmers, fishers or hunters." (HM. I. p. 359 - 360). Nothing is said here about the human relationships that should exist among the city-dwellers. It is rather the various professions of city-dwellers in contrast to the differing occupations of those who feed the city which catch the attention of the author. The presence in the city of "full-time specialists", an organized urban existence and a life of leisure, relative wealth and comfort, all combine to make "possible the pursuit of learning and the cult of art... the possession of the written word which enlarge the individual horizon by the experience of the past and preserve for the future whatever of value man might invent." (HM. I. p. 360). Urbanization and the art of writing therefore constitute the two main pillars of civilization. The other indicators include science, medicine, the fine and applied arts, music and literature. The Bronze Age according to Sir Woolley's account constitutes "The Beginnings of Civilization" because the pillars and the indicators of civilization became measurable from that period.

II

Having introduced racial differences among men before the end of the Late Stone Age, and the sedentary mode of existence in the Neolithic period, Sir Woolley quickly puts forward a theory of rapid change which he calls

"portentous in its ultimate effects and almost bewilderingly rapid in its operation...". (HM. I. p. 363). What is put forward here without any proof, that is, that some areas developed *rapidly* while others stagnated for years, will recur frequently in Sir Woolley's account. He goes ahead to make another questionable claim namely, that this rapid change and development started first, not in Egypt, but in Mesopotamia: "The way he puts it shows he is aware of contrary views: "The revolution started in Mesopotamia and very soon afterwards spread to Egypt ..." (HM. I. p. 363). He acknowledges that similar development occurred both in China and in India. However, he is content to declare its origin in those two places "a matter of conjecture."

A few factors are selected as necessary conditions for man's progress towards civilization. They comprise good soil, moderate climate, human incentive and the "spirit" of social organization. Some of these factors were found in remarkably similar ways in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. In the area of social organization however, the two areas differ. In Egypt the entire population was united under one leader, the Pharaoh. In Mesopotamia people lived in autonomous communities. Sir Woolley sees in this an indication of a profound difference between the two groups of people: "the process of change in the Nile Valley and in the Valley of the Tigris and Euphrates differed in important respects." Here he begins to lay the foundation for the denigration of Egypt and the subsequent claim to the superiority of Sumerian civilization over Egyptian civilization. The next statement of Sir Woolley is therefore expected and understandable: "We shall see later that this contrast in political organization is but one aspect of a profound difference in the spirit of the two civilizations." (HM. I. p. 366). From now on every effort is made to flatter and exaggerate the Mesopotamian/Sumerian contribution to civilization; while on the other hand, a corresponding effort is made to ignore, cast doubt upon or treat with spite great Egyptian achievements.

Unless the basic difference between the two people is properly articulated, argues Sir Woolley, modern man would not understand the true course of history. "The course of history can only be properly understood when it is realized that the similarity in the physical conditions of Egypt and Mesopotamia is only partial; actually the two valleys differ

fundamentally ..." (HM. I. p. 415). And so Sir Leonard Woolley sets out to correct what he considers undue credit given to the role of ancient Egypt in world history. In order to do this he makes use of two theories. There was a rigid centralization of power in the hands of the Egyptian kings, who were neither benevolent nor particularly intelligent. The second theory was articulated in an earlier chapter: "A lotus- land existence in which nature supplies a livelihood without the need of effort applies no spur to initiative ..." (HM. I. p. 364). The Nile Valley by making life relatively easy for the Egyptian made him less creative. Thus the early Egyptians did not feel challenged by their environment. That fact among others constituted part of the difference between the two groups. In Mesopotamia the situation is presented quite differently. The climate along the Euphrates valley goes from extreme heat to extreme cold. Besides, its current could be violent in some areas. In some other areas the waters stagnate, making it absolutely necessary to drain away "the superfluous water." "Drainage in Mesopotamia is as essential as irrigation." (HM. I. p. 418). It was a challenge which promised enormous rewards including "two harvests in the year... But against this tremendous advantage was set the colossal amount of labour involved." (HM. I. p. 418). The labour in question went beyond mere manual work. It entailed "also an elaborate organization." Unlike Egypt that was united under one absolute divine ruler, Mesopotamia started off as independent city states. The difference was due not to differing "mentalities" but rather to the "logic of circumstances." From this assumption of initial social organization, Sir Woolley reconstructs the growth and development of civilization in the West from the angle of urbanization. It was thus claimed that the Euphrates region was from the start, a "mosaic of city states" whose general characteristics were the city walls, the king's palace and the city pantheon or temple for public worship. At the end of the reconstruction Sir Woolley concluded that the Sumerian civilization was from the beginning an urban civilization which combined agriculture with trade and industry at the level of the individual; thereby laying the foundation for a democratic way of life.

The situation in Egypt was so reconstructed by Sir Woolley that it makes no sense talking about the Egyptian social existence in terms of

urbanization or civilization. In "the unified kingdom

of Egypt... the city was really non-existent." (HM. I. p. 415). The Egyptians had no experience of city states. The local communities were never organized like in Sumer under independent administrative units. The entire country was under the Pharaoh who "legislated for the country as a whole indiscriminately and arbitrarily." (HM. I. p. 430). The organization was so centralized that it did not lead to the growth of urbanization. In fact the whole culture was not built around a civic existence. The capital was moved from place to place simply "to suit the tastes or the habits of a new dynasty". Even in the capital itself there was no "real civic life." The other towns and provincial capitals were even worse. The towns were usually without walls and "small in size". In fact it is not proper to call these communities "towns" since they lacked basic principles of town planning. Even the individual town houses of the rich reflected the life style of "people with a keen appreciation of comfort" and nothing more. Two basic and important facts must be borne in mind concerning these town houses: "In the first place, these are not city houses at all; they happen to be grouped together, and the collection justifies the name 'town', but in their sprawling layout they violate the first principles of urban architecture and it is clear that they have behind them no traditions of urban life. In the second place, they do not represent any middle-class tradition; they simply reproduce, on a small scale, the mansions of the nobility..." (HM. I. p. 435). Since urbanization constitutes one of the two main pillars of civilization, Egypt must be represented as an essentially rural or agricultural community, in order that it might be shown to have lacked from the beginning the basic ingredient of real civilization:

> Although based on entirely different economic principles, social conditions throughout the Egyptian countryside must have been very much the same in
> the second millennium BC. as in the nineteenth century AD. with an essentially rural population content to stagnate in villages and small towns... (p. 450).

Very few cultivated scholars would write about other people in

such derogatory language as the above.

III

The development from pictogram to hieroglyph and finally to phonetic symbol is one of the greatest accomplishments of man. Since writing, according to Sir Woolley, is the symbol per excellence of civilization, it is natural to expect that he would give Sumeria, not Egypt, the credit for its invention. "So far as we know, the Sumerians were the first people to evolve a proper system of writing ..." (HM. I. p. 632). This hypothesis is so important to Sir Woolley that he had to go to all kinds of doubtful theories of language structure in order to "establish" it. The basic idea sounds rather simple - "that a written sign might represent not a thing but a sound." (HM. I. p. 634). Nevertheless, according to Sir Woolley, the Sumerians were the first to evolve the idea and no other people could have done it. There are really two issues here. One is whether in fact writing was invented not by the Egyptians but by the Sumerians. The second is why the Sumerians were the first to develop the art of writing. With regard to the first question, our author is aware that his is not the only hypothesis; and that even though he "champions the idea of the Sumerian origin of writing..." scholars are not of course, all agreed on this hypothesis." (HM. I. p. 664 note 3). With regard to the second question, Sir Woolley tries in an unconvincing manner to put forward a theory. He first rejects the theory which has been propounded that the idea of making the picture signs represent sounds instead of the object pictured was first suggested by the existence in both the Sumerian and the Egyptian languages of 'homonyms', that is, of words having the same sound but different meanings." (HM. I. p. 634). The acceptance of this theory, he objects, would mean admitting "that the art of writing could have been invented independently in both countries and that the apparent priority of Sumer may have been merely the result of accident or again may rest simply upon the incomplete character of the archaeological evidence at our disposal." (HM. I. p. 634). This is obviously a prospect unacceptable to Sir Woolley, who seems to have made up his mind *a priori* that the Sumerians must be made to appear superior to the Egyptians. So he gropes around and stumbles upon a rather weak argument namely, that "Sumerian

was unique amongst the languages of the ancient Middle East in being agglutinative ..."; (HM. I. p. 635). This is definitely not true. Besides, Sir Woolley was aware that the Sumerian language was not unique in being agglutinative. Other people did bring this fact to his notice: "Professor A. Caquot points out that Sumerian is not the only agglutinative ancient eastern language; Hurrite and Urartaean were also agglutinative." (HM. I. p. 664 note 5). One wonders at the type of interpretative historical reconstruction that does not respect truth. Furthermore, we are told that the characteristic of the agglutinative language is the stringing together of words "in order to express more complicated or novel meanings". Each word or the new compound serves as a syllable and retains only that part of its original meaning that is necessary to contribute to the new meaning. The meaning of the new word, continues Sir Woolley, is also new and quite different from the mere combination of the elements constituting it. It is rather "something that results from the association of the ideas of those things." (HM. I. p. 636). This is perhaps the most important characteristic because, argues Sir Woolley, it is from this mere association of ideas that the transition is made from pictures to sounds, and so to writing strictly speaking. Our author explains this in a long passage:

> Now if in speech you string together the names of things to make a new word, and if you have been accustomed to drawing pictograms that represent those things, then it requires no great effort of the imagination to see that by stringing together the pictograms you automatically represent the new word. The grouped signs, representing things, simply reproduce the grouped words which are the names of those things, but because they are similarly grouped the effect of their association is similar; the pictographic sign becomes syllabic because the spoken word has done so already... When that happens the gulf between non-writing and writing has been bridged. (p. 636).

Having "proved" to his satisfaction that the agglutinative nature of Sumerian was responsible for the people inventing the art of writing before everyone else, Sir Woolley goes further to "prove" also that the Egyptians not only did not, but could not have invented the art of writing, and had to borrow the "idea" from the Sumerians. He confesses that the developmental

sequence of the art of writing in Egypt cannot be traced with the same detail as in Sumer. His explanation is that "the Egyptians took over the principle of writing ready-made from the Sumerians and so were able to achieve in a very short space of time and with the minimum of experiment results which the inventors of the principle had evolved slowly and painfully." (HM. I. p. 645). Alternatively, one would have thought that because the Egyptians wrote on very fragile material, the papyrus, the stages of the evolution of their art of writing could have been lost that way. Of course such an alternative explanation could not possibly have occurred to Sir Woolley. Instead, he goes further to argue:

> Had they been left to themselves the Egyptians could hardly have evolved any such syllabic system of writing as they actually employed. Their language was not, like the Sumerian, agglutinative... The transition from the meaning denoted by a pictorial sign to the sound of its spoken name, which is the essential step in the development of writing,... would not have suggested itself to the Egyptian mind unless prompted by a foreign example proving its feasibility. (p. 645).

Only a writer blinded by prejudice could denigrate in such terms a race that taught the world mathematics, built the pyramids, invented the calendar and much more without the help of "a foreign example". A few pages later, perhaps out of shame or guilt for such insult, Sir Woolley comments: "One must indeed emphasize the fact that the scribes who developed the Egyptian script did not copy the Sumerian system; they took over from it the main idea, that a written sign could have a phonetic value... but for the rest they were guided by the character of their own language." (p. 647). And so, after this palliative, he feels he has "proved" his claim that the Egyptians borrowed the art of writing from the Sumerians. The rest of the ancient world, the Indians and the Chinese could not have developed, on their own and independently, the art of writing. Since Sir Woolley's argument for crediting the Sumerians with the development of the art of writing, and for denying it to the Egyptians, is based upon the agglutinative nature of the Sumerian language, it would be good to look at the matter a little more closely. Sir Woolley makes it appear as if agglutination is something special or unique, particularly in connection with the Sumerian

language. The words *agglutination* and *agglutinative*, derive from the Latin verb *agglutinare* meaning "to fasten to", "to glue to". It is from the present participle *agglutinans*, *agglutinantis* meaning "uniting closely, causing or tending to cause adhesion", that the English derivatives take their origin. Its use is not limited to the field of linguistics. We talk about an agglutinating substance as an agglutinant. Similarly, we talk about the capacity of virus particles, bacteria or even red blood cells to agglutinate. In linguistic terms agglutination simply describes the combination of words into a compound. It is, according to Webster's Dictionary, "the formation of derivative or compound words by putting together constituents of which each expresses a single definite meaning". This would seem to be a common characteristic of many languages including Latin, Greek, English, German and Igbo. In fact the word itself in its original Latin verb *agglutinare* is agglutinative, being compounded from the transitive verb *glutino, glutinare* "to glue or paste together", and the preposition *a* or *ab*, "on the side of". We are familiar with the compounding of the Greek *philos*, "love" and *sophia*, "wisdom" to make *philosophia* "love of wisdom". The English "shipyard" is too obvious to require any comment. The Igbo for white man is *Nwoke-ocha*, *Nwoke* meaning "man" in the sense of a male, and *ocha*, an adjective meaning "white". German is as agglutinative as any language could be. In German the intransitive verb *Kranken* means "to suffer from"; *Haus* means "houses"; and *Land* means "land", "country", "territory". Thus in German *Kranken-haus* means "hospital", while *Land-Kranken-haus* stands for "general hospital". In each of these examples in five different languages, every element of the compound keeps its own meaning, making the compound a mere collection of its elements. Sir Woolley could not have been more incorrect when he claimed that in an agglutinative language "the meaning of the compound ... is something new - notjust a collection of the things named but something that results from the association of the ideas of those things." (p. 636). He equally went off course in arguing that each compound "retains just as much of its original meaning as is needed to complete that of the compound". Each example in each of the five languages above, contradicts Sir Woolley's position. His further argument that the spoken word conveys an idea "related only indirectly to the various

things named by the several elements composing it" is obviously false.
It was wrong-headed of Sir Woolley to have gone ahead on the basis of these questionable claims to argue further that the association of ideas arising from the claimed "indirect" relationship of agglutination stimulated the Sumerian movement from pictogram to phonetic symbol, that it, "from the meaning denoted by a pictorial sign to the sound of its spoken name". That movement could have been stimulated by the Egyptian "homonyms", words with the same sound but different meanings. The agglutinative nature of any language, including Sumerian, does not predispose its native speakers in any special way towards moving from pictograms to phonetic symbols. On other words, Sir Woolley was just being prejudiced in claiming that the movement from sign to sound could not have occurred to the Egyptians because their language was not agglutinative. A conscious attempt to twist historical facts or invent some, in order to sustain a cherished hypothesis, is neither history nor civilization.

IV

As we proceed further with Sir Woolley into the other areas of human development, his treatment of Egypt degenerates even more. He tells us, that "The Babylonians possessed a scientific knowledge of algebra, geometry and arithmetic; The Egyptians on the contrary, had in these subjects no real science at

all." (p. 668). His argument is that the Egyptian approach to mathematics was pragmatic. He complains about the fact that the Egyptian never formulated general principles of mathematics, never studied mathematics for its own sake. He "merely wanted certain working rules which would enable him to deal with practical problems in daily life..." (p. 669). So long as the method he has evolved satisfied "his immediate needs he was content". In this way, continues Sir Woolley, Egyptian mathematics, the basis of which "was simple addition", remained without any improvement, and having reached a certain stage of development by about 2700 BC., would "seem to have simply stagnated." (p. 669). Furthermore, he argues, since the Egyptian mathematics had no general principles each

"problem had to be worked out individually". Having gradually prepared the reader's mind that the ancient Egyptian was not the mathematical genius everybody thought he was, Sir Woolley comes down on him with a familiar insult: "By dint of considerable ingenuity and of infinite patience the Egyptian was able to meet all his practical needs by the use of a means childishly imperfect; the sources available to us suggest nothing in the nature of advanced science, and we may well believe that in that respect he was incurious as well as ignorant." (p. 673). Paradoxically, the same "ignorant" Egyptian's "approximation for the square of the circle" was considered even by Sir Woolley himself as "remarkably correct". Furthermore, Sir Woolley confesses his inability to explain "how the Egyptian was able to calculate correctly the volume of the frustrum of a square-based pyramid, given the height and the measurements of lower and upper base, the formula for which operation is found in a Moscow Papyrus..." (p. 673). Since he could not explain the problem, unique in Egyptian mathematics as known to us", he naturally argues in favour of "a borrowing from Babylonian algebra." (p. 673). Professor A. A. Vaiman has argued "that there is no proof of Egyptian borrowing from the Babylonians on this point..." (p.697 note 3). Sir Woolley can be revoltingly prejudiced. We are informed by Sir Woolley that the Babylonians, unlike the Egyptians, "approached mathematics by way not of arithmetic but of algebra." This was supposed to be more scientific than the Egyptian method. Nevertheless, the same Babylonian, more scientific than the Egyptian, appears less accurate than the "ignorant" Egyptian, in his solutions to mathematical problems. Sir Woolley argues that this "fact is really beside the point". It is amazing to listen to the logic of his argument:

> If, for the area of a circle and for the length of its perimeter, the Babylonian ... arrived only at an approximation not so close to the truth as the Egyptian, the fact is really beside the point; we may perhaps surmise that it resulted from his trying to solve the problem by abstract calculations which proved to be beyond his powers while the Egyptian used the empirical method with a success measured by his patience and perseverance. (p. 676).

How Sir Woolley came to the conclusion that the ancient Egyptians

had more "patience and perseverance" than the Babylonians is not quite clear. The important truth is that the "ignorant" Egyptian got his mathematics correct where the "scientific" Babylonian failed. There is no doubt in Sir Woolley's mind that the Babylonian was far superior to the Egyptian in mathematics. After all, the Babylonian "had worked out those scientific exercises of geometry which for the Egyptian were a closed book; thus the Babylonian knew the 'theorem of Pythagoras' about the square of the hypothenus of a right-angled triangle being equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides..." (p. 676). It is difficult to judge

whether Sir Woolley is writing out of culpable ignorance or with deliberate intent to mislead his readers. Those who are better informed on the subject than Sir Woolley have contrary views. It is common knowledge among those who have taught or studied ancient philosophy that Pythagoras spent close to twenty years in Egypt studying mathematics and other subjects. Besides, the so-called "Pythagoras theorem" is actually Egyptian in origin. Beatrice Lumpkin's brilliant article "Mathematics and Engineering in the Nile Valley", shows how the ancient Egyptians, long before Pythagoras, had dealt with the problem of the sum of two squares being equal to a third in area; and how Egyptian investigations "could lead to the formulation of the so-called Pythagorean theorem."

This problem of the sum of two squares, equal in area to a third square ... resembles an application of the "Pythagorean theorem". Another such relationship is built into the Egyptian measurements of length which include cubits, double remens equal to the diagonal of a 1-cubit square, and remens ... These specific examples of Pythagorean triples indicate that Egyptians were conducting investigations that could lead to the formulation of the so-called Pythagorean theorem.[5]

She adds as though she were referring specifically to Sir Leonard Woolley: "Yet the style in Western historiography is to deny any possibility that ancient Egyptians contributed to the development of this theorem".[6] She then asks in apparent frustration "And why is this theorem still known after Pythagoras when he came on the scene 1,000 years later?" The answer is because the West does not want to give the credit of originating the idea to the ancient Egyptians even though they taught Pythagoras mathematics

V

It is difficult for some people to accept the inaccuracies, prejudices and arrogance of the author of "The Beginnings of Civilization". Sir Woolley was himself quite aware of this difficulty. In one of those rare moments of clarity, he writes in the Author's Preface: "Since I figure on the title-page as sole author I may well be thought guilty of intellectual arrogance in that I have ventured to write on so many subjects lying outside my own experience and knowledge ..." (HM. I. p. 381). He knew equally well that there would be those who would object, and with reason, to both his "intellectual arrogance" and lack of "experience and knowledge". Hence he concludes the Preface in these words: "... to readers who may, not unnaturally, hesitate to accept what I say on matters so far from my competence I would plead that 'the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau'". (p. 361).

This sort of disclaimer is certainly not enough to correct all the omissions, distortions and misrepresentations in Sir Woolley's "interpretative" reconstruction of man's past, especially as it relates to ancient Egypt. His account would appear to be a conscious attempt to re-write history in a way that would set in motion a progressive denial of Egyptian contribution to civilization. He seems quite resentful of the achievements of ancient Egyptians, particularly the recognition accorded them by previous historians. For example, he acknowledges that in comparison with the Egyptian, "the Babylonian's knowledge of anatomy appears to have been very slight". (p. 692). On account of their tradition of embalmment, with "over a hundred anatomical terms" at their disposal, "the Egyptians had learnt to distinguish a great many organs and organic structures which their Mesopotamian contemporaries failed to recognize". (p. 692). He came right back with a negative qualification. Since they used one and the same word to denote "the nerves, muscles, arteries and veins ... these they had entirely failed to understand". (p. 692). He therefore concludes with a warning about giving the Egyptians too much credit. "Nonetheless must we be careful not to over estimate Egyptian surgical

science." (p. 692). Another example is his lack of adequate treatment of the wonders of the Egyptian pyramids. He manages to make one or two grudging statements to the effect that "the workmanship of the pyramid builders has never been surpassed in any country. The size of the blocks ... together with the accuracy of their joining, constitutes a problem which no scholar has been able fully to answer regarding the methods employed." (p. 534). Had any pyramid, even an unfinished one, been found anywhere in the Western world, especially in Sumeria, Sir Leonard Woolley would have had a lot to tell us about pyramid building. He would have certainly fabricated a theory of a foreign influence from which the Egyptian had to learn and very quickly perfected.

His account is informed by a diffusionist hypothesis awkwardly handled. Practically every human development originated with the Sumerians or their descendants. The rest of mankind had to borrow from or depend upon this rare breed of humans. The idea of stagnation was also introduced early in the account and permeates through the whole story. It is used primarily to denigrate Egyptian civilization; although other groups like the Phoenicians also stagnated at one point or the other. The whole approach is too subjective.

The problem started in part, with the initial conception of civilization. It is indeed paradoxical that Sir Woolley limits his conception of civilization to purely physical and external considerations. One would have expected some measure of interest in inter-personal civility and human relationship. Perhaps this obvious lack is not as accidental as it might appear, nor peculiar to Sir Leonard Woolley. It is entirely possible that the West does not care deeply about human relationship; or has become so "developed" technologically that human values are no longer very important to it. This may explain, in part, Sir Woolley's disregard for obvious historical facts, the lack of concern for truth and objectivity in his treatment of ancient Egypt. Perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of the whole situation is the silence and apparent acceptance, by most of the other experts, of an account that is so blatantly prejudiced. This too forms part of the paradoxes of Western civilization, that is, never to oppose openly another Westerner's treatment of a non-Westerner, as long as one's

interest is not adversely affected.

Footnotes

1. *History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development*, Volume One: *Prehistory and The Beginning of Civilization*, Jacquetta Hawkes and Sir Leonard Woolley, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963). Volume Two: *The Ancient World: 1200 BC. to AD. 500*, Luigi Pareti, Assisted by Paolo Brezzi and Luciano Petech, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965). Volume Three: *The Great Medieval Civilizations*, Gaston Wiet, Vadime Elisseeff, Philippe Wolff and Jean Naudou, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975). Volume Four: *The Foundations of the Modern World 1300-1775*, Louis Gottschalk, Loren C. Mackinney and Earl H. Pritchard, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969). Volume Five: *The Nineteenth Century 1775-1905*, Charles Moraze (ed.) (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976).

Volume Six: *The Twentieth Century*, Caroline Ware, K. M. Panikkar and J. M. Romein, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966).

2. The Foreword by the 1962 Director-General of UNESCO, Monsieur Rene Maheu, introduces the whole work, Thirteen Volumes in all. Volume One, p. xi.

3. Sir Leonard Woolley, "The Beginnings of Civilization", *History of Mankind*, Volume One, Part Two, pp. 357-830. Sir Woolley's contribution to this volume is the main topic of this paper. Subsequent references to this volume will be incorporated in the main text and enclosed in parentheses, abbreviated HM. I. for *History of Mankind* Volume One, followed by the page number. After a while, only the page number will be indicated.

4. Gordon Childe, "Civilization, Cities and Towns" in *Antiquity*, No. 121, March 1957, p. 36. Quoted in *History of Mankind*, Volume One, Part Two, p. 359.

5. Beatrice Lumpkin, "Mathematics and Engineering in the Nile Valley" in Ivan van Sertima (ed;) *Nile Valley Civilizations* (New Brunswick), *Journal of African Civilizations*, 1985. pp. 108-9.

6. Lumpkin Ibid., p. 109.