

## ONE WORD BEFORE YOUR START INTO DESERT

Every year thousands of people visit the Sahara in order to research, to work or just because they have been attracted by the fascination of the desert. Many of them bring home at least one arrow head or other stone implements for souvenir and doing so they spoil, for the most part unknowingly and often apparently justified by scientific interest, an important source of historical reference from one of the poorest and least known countries of Africa.

Certainly, the number of archaeological sites seems to be inexhaustible, as once did the number of whales or the tropical forest in the world. But even today there are already regions, where not one stone age settlement has been left untouched. The just one tool taken could be the crucial link in a chain of information decoding a message from pre-history. An historical document missing an unknown number of pages is virtually as worthless as the pages themselves when they are taken out of context. African history is mainly unwritten history and thus in particular relies on archaeological sources.

Today, there are surely greater problems facing the countries concerned than these. But later generations will blame our time for the ruin of their cultural heritage that is more final than the looting of art during colonial times.

One does not have to be an archaeologist to recognize these consequences of an uncontrolled passion for collecting. Ralph Bagnold pointed out this problem in a warning which was supported by Professor Théodore Monod and Dr. Hans Rhotert. All three belong to the pioneers who in the first half of the 20th century opened up vast parts of the Sahara. Their joint appeal is aimed to those who love the desert as they did and likewise feel responsible for this legacy of the past – which only seems inexhaustible.

Take care that your journey does not contribute to the further ruination of a rich but currently unwritten chapter of cultural history. The loss to future generations can never be reclaimed.

## PROTECT THE SAHARAN HERITAGE !



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## THE STONE AGE LEGACY OF THE DESERT

Taken from the foreword to "Desert Landforms in Southwest Egypt" (El-Baz & Maxwell, eds., NASA, Washington 1982) discussing the exploitation of the Sahara, where after the despoiling of water and fuel now also the archaeological wealth is threatened.

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"The desert is vulnerable to Man's activities in another, very different sense. Having been subjected to wind erosion for a great period of time, evidence of its past successive human occupations are all concentrated together on the present surface. Hence if appreciable progress is ever to be made in the interpretation of the human past in this desert it seems probable that special methods involving comparative statistics concerning the surface density and distribution of the various types of artifacts will be necessary ...

... But, alas, human nature is such that the temptation to pick up and remove ancient artifacts seen lying on the ground is almost irresistible. Even now the original statistical pattern of artifact distribution must in some places have already spoilt ...

... There is, in this wonderful desert, unlimited scope for many more scientific expeditions ... But for the sake of posterity it is to be hoped (I fear probably in vain) that mankind's craving for exploitation will not lead to the exhaustion of the accumulated past, whether of water or of archaeology, in the same way as is now happening in the case of fossil fuels."

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**Hence give up all claim to souvenirs, keep your inquiring mind in check and help to save the past for the future!**

RALPH A. BAGNOLD O.B.E., F.R.S.

