

Dissenting Opinions

Authors who disagree with reviewers, or reviewers who disagree with authors, doubtless on occasions would welcome the chance to meet their critics face to face. Since very often they cannot, we hope every now and then to allow them to unlimber their heavy artillery on this battlefield.

More than once there has been an occasion when I have felt like writing a letter to some publication (never *The Saturday Review*) criticizing a criticism of some book in which I held a fatherly interest. I have managed to refrain, however, because I have observed that the critic's position is analogous to a land battery which can blow the complaining author out of the water.

Now, with Mr. John Weld's letter of April 20 criticizing my review of his "Don't You Cry for Me," I am astonished to find myself on the other side of the fence—in the critic's bulwark.

But I know just how Mr. Weld feels and I sympathize with him and I admire him for doing a thing I never dared do. Consequently I am not going to give him the business. At the same time, however, I cannot haul down my colors because I wrote my honest opinion about his book.

Mr. Weld says I erred in my date on "Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt," which invalidates my criticism of his errors. His characters sang the song in 1846. He says now it was published in 1848 instead of my 1850.

If he has gone to headquarters for his information, if he has checked in the Library of Congress or the copyright record, I offer my apology. However, in the music department of Buffalo's Grosvenor Reference Library there is filed a copy of a "Sweet Alice" first edition copyrighted in 1850. Of course that copy may be a counterfeit or something.

Perhaps I should say also that the reason I did not list any more inaccuracies in my review was not from lack of potential material. I simply employed the Gallup method of sampling a few representative suspect phrases.

After all, I could not follow his entire trail, checking point by point such as how a woman went about baking cookies when traveling in a covered wagon and if people actually used the term "daffy" in 1846, although Partridge's Dictionary of Slang gives the earliest known use as 1884.

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Paris sans Parisians

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS. By Janet Flanner ("Genet" of The New Yorker). New York: Simon & Schuster. 1940. 415 pages. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HAROLD STEARNS

THOUGH an entertaining, provocative, and superbly well written collection of character studies, the title of Miss Flanner's book, "An American in Paris," is something of a misnomer; even the acid sub-title, "Profile of an Interlude between Two Wars," is hardly correct except as giving one a chronological key to the mood. In a word, this is a study of different personalities seen from a Paris background by an American; it is hardly the story of Miss Flanner herself in Paris, which is what one might have naively and perhaps hopefully expected. Indeed, only in the historical bird's-eye view of her excellent and sensible prefatory note, "All Gaul Is Divided," does Miss Flanner speak out in her own right as an American reflecting on the period in France between 1920 and 1940, and even there the date-line is Orgeval, Seine-et-Oise (where presumably she lived and did most of her work for this book, rather than Paris itself).

What is more, these character studies themselves are, so to speak, but incidentally and externally connected with Paris—and, in the case of Hitler, we can only hope will remain so, as in the case of Queen Mary we should be shocked if they turned out to be anything else. Igor Stravinsky, of course, was an international rather than a strictly Parisian possession;

Edith Wharton loved France, yet she left her correspondence and biographical material to Yale; our own Ambassador Bullitt was born in upper-class Philadelphia and still retains some of its upper-class stigmata; and Isadora Duncan came out of California, trailing some of its eccentricities as well as its clouds of glory, among whom was, finally, that almost legendary party-giver, Elsa Maxwell, who started her skyrocketing social career with a boat-ride for her little friends (at their parents' expense) in San Francisco at the ripe age of ten.

Of the dressmakers, spontaneously thought of as *Parisian par excellence*, the facts are these:—Mainbocher was born in Chicago; Elsa Schiaparelli is of a distinguished Italian family; and Gabrielle Chanel is an Auvergnate, which, to a Parisian, means something very like the relation of a Scotchman to a Londoner—and with much the same kind of jokes about close-fistedness concerning money, too. (In truth, of all the *couturiers* Miss Flanner discusses, only Paul Poiret is a true Parisian.)

To be sure, there is a delightful hundred-odd page section, called "Crime and Punishment"—grim yet humorous, shrewd yet sensitive, and full of real perception of French character—which deals almost exclusively with French crooks (like the formidable Mme. Hanau) and French murderers (or *esses*). One has the feeling, however, that Miss Flanner would have written as illuminatingly of almost any of our own gang and—more recently—syndicate murders, had she happened to have been assigned to the chronicling of them instead of having been *The New Yorker's* representative in France. Her sketches give a clear if somewhat unlovely glimpse into several neurotic and fantastic sides of exceptional French characters, showing Miss Flanner to be an extraordinarily good reporter.

But an everyday, routine, humdrum citizen of Paris, who pays his taxes, goes to church on Sunday morning and to the races on Sunday afternoon, plays checkers at his neighborhood *bistrot*, talks radical and votes conservative, and whose whole life centers around his little family (which does *not* often include an expensive mistress on the side)—well, I suppose it wasn't Miss Flanner's job to tell about *him*. Perhaps, indeed, she never met him. Very few Americans in Paris do meet him. And at least in that respect, if not stylistically, Miss Flanner is quite conventional, and her book is not a misnomer at all.



A Drypoint by S. Van Abbé from "Fine Prints of the Year, 1931."

The Ages of Persian Art

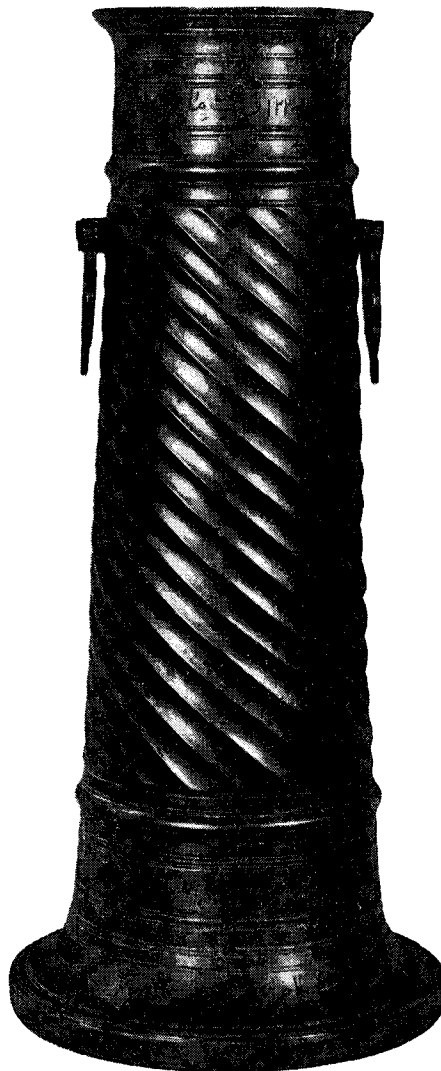
A SURVEY OF PERSIAN ART, From Prehistoric Times to the Present. Arthur Upham Pope, Editor; Phyllis Ackerman, Assistant Editor. 6 vols. Oxford University Press. \$210.

Reviewed by GEORGE C. MILES

“THE old Iranian civilization died at Salamis, the most momentous event in the history of mankind, which decided between Asia and Europe.” These startling words, unobtrusively emitted in the course of a dispassionate estimate of the contributions of early Iran to the civilization of the ancient world, are, when read with their implications, suitable apology for a book consisting of nearly three thousand pages of text and fifteen hundred plates. If we must write about the buried past—and there seem to be enough who believe we should—there is this much, and much more, to be written about the arts of Persia, which were born in the fourth (or was it the fifth?) millenium B.C., died at Salamis, came to life again and again with the foreign breath of Macedonians and Indians, Arabians, Turks, and Mongols, and died again at last within the memory of living man. Nor are these arts all buried; their heritage, rather, lives in our midst today. If Persian art were just the dry stuff on which archeologists feed, these heavy tomes would find their way only to stern and incorruptible academic shelves.

As it is, these volumes, so comprehensive in their content, and priced as they are (it must have cost a Persian prince's ransom to produce the illustrations), are intended not for the scholar's workshop but for the collector's library. The archeologist serves up his often bitter medicine in more concentrated doses, and the “learned journal” is usually the vessel. When he goes on holiday and writes for a wider public as he has done in this magnificent work, his material freshens by contact with the outside air, and the curious inquirer, if he can afford to read so sumptuously, discovers a world of unsuspected beauty in places and ages never dreamt of—Sakastan, Man, Mitannu, Atropatene, Trans-Soghdiana, Elam, Luristan, Azerbaijan, Khwarezm; Susa, Nihavand, Tepe Hisar, Afrasiyab, Kashan, Saveh, Amol; Kassites, Medians, Scythians, Parthians, Achaemenids, Sasanians, Saffarids, Buyids, Samanids, Ghaznavids, Seljuqs, Il-Khanids, Saffavids. A grand procession of names.

There are now on exhibition in the old Union Club, Fifth Avenue and Fifty-first Street, New York City, masterpieces of Persian art comprising six thousand years of Persian culture. The exhibition is directed by Professor Arthur Upham Pope, director of the Iranian Institute and editor of the volumes reviewed on this page, who some time ago planned and arranged the magnificent International Exhibit held in London. According to Dr. Pope, the collections at the Union Club which are of course of general interest have special appeal for industrial designers and the practising architects for whose benefit models, plans, and photographic enlargements are displayed.—EDITOR'S NOTE.



Brass candle stick, 17th century. (From the Exhibition of Persian Art, Iranian Institute)

The editors' task has been a nearly impossible one (perhaps it would be nearer the truth to call it impossible without qualification): to assign each age and aspect of Persian art to a competent authority, and to bring to the whole work some semblance of unity and a sense of continuity; this in addition to the usual, and in this case, voluminous, mechanical duties of editorship. On the whole they have succeeded remarkably well. Where it was not possible to find the competent authority who was willing to contribute, they themselves have tried to fill the gap. Continuity has not always been achieved, often simply because in the present state of research it is historically lacking; and there is an unevenness of standard and quality which is inevitable in a composite work of many contributors.

In brief, this reviewer would offer a criticism of the work where others, including some of the promoters of the “Survey,” have given their most generous praise: its great size detracts from, rather than contributes to its success, when measured in any terms other than magnificence. This is not the place for detailed criticism or comment; that must be left to the scholars and their learned journals. Here, aside from these general observations, it is fitting rather to give some idea of the riches that the owner of these volumes will possess.

The first volume begins with a chapter by the principal editor on the significance of Persian art and carries the reader from the prehistoric cultures of Iran down through the Sasanian period. Professor Herzfeld and Sir Arthur Keith contribute a valuable summary of “Iran as a Prehistoric Centre;” prehistoric art is represented by various excavators and commentators, including MM. De Meequenem (of Susa), Contenau, and Dussaud. The latter writes the first comprehensive statement of the fascinating bronzes of Luristan. Personal ornaments receive rather more than their due, and seals rather less. The treatment of Achaemenid art is inclusive but uneven; and a number of contributors struggle valiantly with the elusive Parthian culture. Certainly the best achievement in this latter section is Mr. E. T. Newell's chapter on the Parthian coinages. Sasanian architecture is competently handled by Professor Reuther, and the great Friedrich Sarre contributes a chapter on Sasanian stone sculpture. Dr. Richard Ettinghausen, in charac-