

Early Man in the Nile Valley*

IT is a commonplace of archaeological writing to refer to the part played by the great river systems of Egypt and Mesopotamia in the origin and development of civilisation; yet it is only recently that any systematic attempt has been made to ascertain how far the Nile Valley, which has afforded precise evidence of the development of culture in its relatively early stages, might not also, by an examination of geological conditions and their correlation with archaeological data, help to solve some of the problems of man's earliest beginnings.

Preliminary reports of the work of the expedition to the oasis of El-Khargeh conducted by Miss Caton-Thompson and Miss Eleanor Gardiner indicate that by the discovery of stone implements in sealed deposits a substantial advance has been made towards an accurate dating of early stages of man's progress in Egypt; but of this the precise extent will be appreciated only when the final report of the expedition is available. In the meantime, Messrs. Arkell and Sandford in the volume now under notice put forward an instalment of what they hope eventually will be a complete survey of the evidence, here pieced together for the first time, to be found in the Nile Valley from the Second Cataract to the Mediterranean, which bears upon its earliest inhabitants up to known pre-dynastic times.

The work was begun in 1926-27 with a survey of both banks of the Nile from Luxor to Kom Ombo and a study of the First Cataract region at Assuan. The following seasons were devoted to the Faiyum, the Nile Delta and then again to Upper Egypt, when the areas around Luxor and southward from Kom Ombo towards Assuan were again examined. It is the work of the first season and the last, the fourth, which is embodied in this volume, covering the ground from Semnah to Luxor.

The Pleistocene period, which is the authors' main concern, has left its mark indelibly on the landscape of Egypt. As they point out, it was a period of copious rainfall. Forest and grassland covered the landscape, and the wadies were running streams. The signs of rainfall are everywhere apparent in deeply dissected plateaux, cliffs torn by gullies, which are often filled with huge boulders, and in the pot-holed and polished beds of dry waterfalls. A brimming Nile has left its traces in the terrace gravels. These now stand at levels, remarkable for their uniformity throughout their length, of 50 ft., 100 ft. and 150 ft., or more, above the present bed of the river. In some,

but not all, of these terraces, implements of palaeolithic man are found.

Artefacts first appear in the 100 ft. Pleistocene terrace. Prolonged search in the Pliocene gulf deposits and the Plio-Pleistocene gravels has produced nothing that can be regarded as humanly fashioned; but in the 100-ft. terrace, rolled and unrolled early and late types of Chellean implements appear together. The discovery of Lower Palaeolithic implements in the northern Sudan and through Nubia is an addition to our knowledge of the distribution of these types. In the earlier implements there is a marked tendency to make use of pebbles as the raw material, and the implements are mostly triangular in form. A flake industry shows a close resemblance to the English Clactonian. This is especially to be noted in the cores. Except in one locality, Dhimit, where there is an intermediate terrace at 75 ft.; the next stage is at 50 ft. Here implements belonging to a later or Acheulean age occur on a number of sites.

It may not be out of place at this point to direct attention to the principles of selection which the authors have followed in describing and figuring implements of Lower and Middle Palaeolithic age in this volume. The specimens have been selected from those found on rich sites rather than from sporadic finds, material from the newly discovered Nubian and Sudanese localities being given the preference; in order to illustrate the skill in their manufacture, implements of chert and ironstone, a particularly intractable material, have been chosen rather than those of flint; and only artefacts which can be illustrated natural size are figured. It is to be noted that the assumption is involved that the specimens with which the authors deal are typical of the industries represented.

In the Middle Palaeolithic period, the river entered the Second Cataract apparently for the first time, and two terraces, one at 30 ft. and one at 10 ft., poorly preserved, yield early Mousterian and 'typical' Mousterian of Upper Egypt respectively. Then in later deposits of fine gravels, Mousterian flakes give way to the descendant industry of Lower Sebilian, followed by Middle Sebilian from habitation sites which appear when the deposit of silt had passed its maximum and the falling river-level drained the marshes on the Kom Ombo plain. The Middle Sebilian was followed by a very considerable interval, not necessarily connoting, as Dr. Sandford points out, that the country was uninhabited, before the Upper Sebilian appears on sites of which the lowest, south of Edfu, is 35 ft. above river-level.

For more reasons than one, the Upper Sebilian—an unfortunate term, as Dr. Sandford notes—must be regarded as an industry of no little importance in Egyptian prehistory. At present it is

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known from surface flaking floors only, except at Dibeira West in Nubia, where there are the relics of a riverside industry at the 40-ft. level, which shows little dissimilarity from that newly discovered south of Edfu. It is an industry of little but microliths. Its cores are of two forms: one, a double-ended type, can be traced through Middle and Lower Sebilian; the other, essentially a neanthropic form, is made from a small elongated pebble, from which the two ends have been removed. Geometric forms are common, but the burin and the "Aurignacian retouch" are absent.

It is evident that the series has little in common with Lower and Middle Sebilian; and Dr. Sandford concludes that notwithstanding the view of M. Vignard, who holds that Middle Sebilian forms lead up to Upper Sebilian, a new and outside influence entered the culture of Egypt in Upper Sebilian times. This he associates with Capsian, holding as a necessary corollary that in Egypt

Mousterian forms and technique lingered late*.

A point of further interest in connexion with Upper Sebilian and its possible Capsian affinities is suggested by the rock-drawings at Wadi el-Arab and near Abu Simbel which are here described. The oldest of these drawings, depicting giraffes, are compared with the oldest of the series at Uweinat, in the Libyan Desert, in which the Abbé Breuil finds Bushman affinities. This is interesting in view of the fact that our authors would deduce for the earliest of the drawings at Wadi el-Arab a dating which would equate them with the Upper Sebilian.

It remains only to say that an excellent piece of work has been worthily produced by the Oriental Institute, with a selection of well-chosen and admirably reproduced illustrations.

* For the discussion of a similar problem in an analogous context reference should be made to M. R. Vaufrey's communication on the Capsian in Tunisia in *L'Anthropologie*, 43, 5-6 (see also NATURE, 133, 107, Jan. 20, 1934).

A New Opportunity for Museums

IF Government museums and a relatively small number of municipal and private museums be set on one side, it may be said that the others have struggled along, many fighting but to retain a place, without much encouragement or help from the public, the education authorities, or indeed from any of those who stand to gain most from the use of museum exhibits. Financial encouragement was lacking, so that collections (often free gifts) could not be properly developed or attractively displayed, but even more disabling was the lack of interest, which tended to drive the curator and his staff (if any) back upon themselves, and to repress efforts and schemes which even a modicum of outside interest would have caused to bud and blossom.

Three years ago an opportunity arose for the bettering of museums through the generosity of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, which had been led to see the educational possibilities lying hidden to most eyes in the rich stores of galleries and lockers. Grants were offered for the suitable development of collections from an educative point of view, but the grants were limited to municipal museums and to these in the smaller towns, with populations between 10,000 and 70,000, provided they received a due proportion of financial aid from rates and other local sources.

The restrictions proved to be hampering, and now, at the suggestion of the Museums Association, which has been intimately associated with the scheme in planning and in the allocation of grants, the restrictions are to be modified in the direction of allowing more easy access to grants. The original scheme was planned to run a five years' course; three of the years have passed, and the remaining two years will test the new arrangements.

Put generally, the object of the Carnegie United

Kingdom Trustees is to encourage curators of museums and governing bodies to improve the museum service in their own and in neighbouring areas, and this object is being furthered in two directions, by grants for development and grants for rural service. The grants are no longer confined to municipal museums, nor are they limited to areas falling within definite population limits. They are intended to encourage the working out of any new scheme which will increase the effectiveness of the museum concerned in relation to the community. There are, of course, certain restrictions. It is only fair that the locality should make its contribution, and so no museum need apply unless it receives from rates, income from endowments, or subscriptions, a sum equal to at least threepence a head of the local population. It must have besides (or be about to have) a competent curator, and if the town in which the museum is situated is a large town, the museum must have, in addition, at least one full-time scientific or technical assistant for every 60,000 of the population.

Development grants, which are not meant to be expended on the ordinary running or maintenance costs, but on new endeavours, will not exceed £250 each, and may be considerably less.

Grants for rural service are new, and ought to spread, more than any other effort, an appreciation of museum collections and museum possibilities. The notion, which was effectively illustrated at a special Exhibition of Museum Specimens in the County Hall, London, in 1931, is that the larger museums may well assist rural areas by extending to them the use of loan collections, especially of those circulating loan collections which are adapted by their labelling and by their construction for the use of schools and for safe transport from school to school. To encourage the extension of