

PREHISTORY IN AFRICA

Proceedings of the Pan-African Congress on Pre-history, 1947

Edited by L. S. B. Leakey, assisted by Sonia Cole. Pp. viii+239. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952.) 35s. net.

UNTIL about the second decade of the present century the study of early prehistory was mainly confined to Europe, more particularly to the western regions. Later, as a result of the brilliant researches of a number of prehistorians, the importance of Africa to the subject has been more and more realized. Investigators in all parts of the continent have made discoveries of great interest, and these cannot always be fitted into the narrow framework of the scheme of development created by the prehistorians in western Europe.

Dr. L. S. B. Leakey, a former pupil of the Cambridge school of archaeology, fully realized this situation; but the outbreak of the Second World War delayed any action, and it was not until its conclusion that he determined to call a Congress, held in Nairobi in 1947, to discuss the various early archaeological problems in the African continent. Maybe it was a pity the Congress was called so soon after the War; if it had been summoned a year, or even two years, later many more prehistorians from many more countries would have been able to attend. When important decisions are to be taken, it is well to have more delegates present than were able to be at Nairobi so soon after the close of hostilities; only now has it been possible to produce the proceedings, and most of the papers appear in a very attenuated form. Shortage of paper and expense were, of course, the reasons.

Roughly speaking, the work of the Congress came under three headings: papers dealing with aspects of geology, general palaeontology and climatology; papers on human palaeontology; and papers on prehistoric archaeology. Obviously, before a stone-age culture can be properly understood, the conditions under which it flourished must be known, and this involves questions of Quaternary geology and palaeontology. Prof. C. Arambourg contributes two papers on "African Pleistocene Mammals" and "The Red Beds of the Mediterranean"; and there is a paper, with many diagrams, on "Pleistocene Climate Changes in East Africa" by Dr. E. Nilsson. There are also papers by Abbé H. Breuil, Prof. F. Zeuner and Dr. A. Ruhlmann. The section of the Congress on human palaeontology is nowadays perhaps a little out of date, as the study of early man himself and his precursors in Africa has been going ahead by leaps and bounds. But the facts as known at the time are duly set out in a number of papers by the late Dr. R. Broom, Prof. W. E. le Gros Clark, Prof. R. Dart and others. The final section contains papers on various industries and cultures. Dr. Desmond Clark writes on Somaliland; but shortly his book on this interesting region will be published, and we shall have his work there set before us in detail. The problem of the so-called Tumbian culture in the Congo is discussed by Dr. F. Cabu and Dr. Leakey, and there are also, among many other contributions, papers from Dr. B. D. Malan on "The Final Stages of the Middle Stone Age in South Africa" and by Dr. S. A. Huzayyin on the "Upper Palaeolithic of Egypt".

The volume is, of course, of first-class importance to any prehistorian interested in Africa. It is only

such a pity that factors outside the control of the editors have so delayed its publication. It is to be hoped that the proceedings of the Second Congress, held recently in Algiers, will see the light of day rather more speedily.

MILES BURKITT

PSYCHOSURGICAL STUDIES AT THE GREYSTONE HOSPITAL

Psychosurgical Problems

By the Columbia Greystone Associates, Second Group. Dr. Fred A. Mettler, Editor. Pp. xii+357. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1952.) 42s. net.

THIS book is a second report of the work carried out by a research team known as the Columbia Greystone Associates. The first report by this group, called "Selective Partial Ablation of the Frontal Lobes", dealt with various biological, psychiatric and psychological effects of psychosurgery (particularly topectomy) as applied to psychiatric subjects. The present volume reports a similar study into the after-effects of various less commonly employed psychosurgical procedures (notably cortical, venous, ligation and thermocoagulation).

The seventeen chapters of "Psychosurgical Problems" are written by psychiatrists, psychologists, neurologists, physiologists and other experts in various medical fields, whose names are well known within their specialties. Starting with a general survey of the project and a consideration of the special setting within the Greystone Hospital, the writers take up in turn the surgical procedures employed, general medical findings, neurological findings, vestibular functions and, for the remaining two-thirds of the book, psychological studies. All these contributions are clearly written, scholarly and well presented. Nevertheless, the reader is likely to lay down the book with a feeling of disappointment. In the first place, the number of cases included is rather small; including control subjects, we are dealing only with about thirty patients in all. It may be doubted whether such a small number which, it should be remembered, has to be sub-divided again because of the different operations carried out, really justifies such detailed reporting. In the nature of the case, only very gross changes could be expected to exceed reasonable criteria of statistical significance, and such gross changes would scarcely have required the setting-up of such tremendous experimental apparatus.

In the second place, the reader will find that in this study, as in the one preceding it, conclusions are mainly negative; that is to say, the research workers failed to find changes after the operation in the various areas investigated. It is, of course, possible that surgical interference with the frontal lobes has only very slight and negligible effects on personality, but it is doubtful if such a hypothesis would seriously be entertained by most workers familiar with the field.

The dearth of positive findings is much more likely to be due to a fundamental weakness of this whole endeavour. There is no underlying theory according to which investigations were carried out and procedures selected; there does not even seem to have been a set of guiding hypotheses, the disproval of which might have advanced the study of the field.