

NOTES ON THE COMPARATIVE SERIES OF SKULLS AND CULTURES IN THE MUSEUM.

By L. S. B. LEAKEY, Ph.D.

In the Archaeological case in the Coryndon Memorial Museum, our Society now has an excellent exhibit of plaster casts of most of the famous prehistoric skulls of other parts of the world ranged side by side with casts of the more important stone-age skulls from East Africa.

It may not therefore be out of place to give a brief outline of this interesting comparative series for the benefit of visitors to the Museum. The primitive Mousterian or Neanderthal race, which belongs to the last Glacial period of Europe is represented in our collection by the famous skulls from Gibraltar, La Quina, and La Chapelle. The Gibraltar skull and one of those from La Quina represent the females of the race and that from La Chapelle is a male. The second La Quina skull is that of a child.

Among the more noticeable characteristics of this race is the absence of the " canine fossa " which is the term used to describe the hollow beneath the cheek bone on a skull of *Homo sapiens* type. It will be noted that even in the child this characteristic absence of the " fossa " is very clear. Another characteristic of the Neanderthal is the massive brow-ridge or " torus " which is of a special type. Even in modern races some individuals develop enormous brow-ridges and of course in prehistoric times this was also true of individuals of the *Homo sapiens* type. The Predmost male skull is an excellent example. It must therefore be clearly understood that it is not the size of the " torus " in Neanderthal man that is the characteristic thing but rather the " nature " of the torus.

In *Homo sapiens* the brow-ridges, be they prominent or insignificant, are composed of two separate component parts over each eye. These parts are known as " superciliaries " and " supra-orbitals " and they can be clearly seen as separate units even in the massive brow-ridges of the Predmost skull.

In the Neanderthal race the superciliaries and the supra-orbitals are fused into a single bony prominence and it is really the fusion of the two parts into a single massive ridge that distinguishes the Neanderthal type of brow-ridge from that of *Homo sapiens*.

Although in Africa we have plenty of traces of the culture of the Mousterian type, which in Europe was made by the Neanderthals, we have not yet found any human remains along with the Mousterian culture, so that we cannot say for certain what type of man made it.

In the famous Broken Hill, which is usually termed Rhodesian Man, we have however, a skull which in type approximates closely to that of the Neanderthals, and it is more than likely that it was man of the Broken Hill race who made the African Mousterian culture.

We have a fine cast of the Rhodesian skull and it can be easily seen that it conforms to the Neanderthal type in characteristic torus and in the absence of the canine fossa. The Broken Hill skull is of particular interest to us here in Kenya, as sooner or later, it is almost certain that we shall find this type of skull. If and when that happens we may hope that it will be found under conditions that leave no doubt as to the culture stage with which it is associated.

Turning from skulls of the non-*Homo sapiens* type, let us examine the prehistoric skulls from Africa and elsewhere, which though prehistoric belong essentially to the same species of man as we do. In Europe, authentic skulls of the *Homo sapiens* type are not known earlier than the closing stages of the last Glacial period—the Wurm glacial. At that date in Europe we find that the species was represented by a number of races or tribes which distinguish them from the others. This shows us that we must go much further back in the earth's history if we are to find the common ancestor of these local races. These early races of *Homo sapiens* which in our collection are represented by the Predmost (male and female), Combe Chapelle (male), Chancelade (male), and Cromagnon (male) skulls, differ in minor points from the living races. The chief differences lie in the extra massive features, large size of the jaw and teeth and in certain other characters which are regarded as primitive. On the other hand individuals to-day could be found who are almost indistinguishable from these, our early ancestors.

I might note here that the common belief that a small brain is a primitive character is a fallacy. Nearly all the known early *Homo sapiens* skulls have a bigger brain capacity than the average Englishman. It is not the size of the brain cavity but the quality of the brain that counts.

At the time when the races just mentioned lived in Europe, Kenya too was peopled by man of the *Homo sapiens* type. The skulls marked Gamble's Cave IV, and Cave V, represent a race that was contemporary with the Cromagnon, Combe Chapelle, and Predmost races, while the Elmenteita skulls A, B, D, E, represent the contemporaries of the Chancelade race which belongs to a slightly more recent date.

We have not got in our collection any casts representing the makers of the Neolithic cultures of Europe, but we have a series of casts representing some of the races which flourished in Kenya during the Neolithic period just before the dawn of the Metal Age.

The Nakuru II skull represents one such race and the Willey's Kopje and Makalian skull another. It is interesting to note that the Willey's Kopje race already practised the custom of removing the lower central incisor teeth at an early age, as do some of our modern African tribes. The custom however, was common in Palestine at an even earlier culture stage than the Neolithic.

For comparative purposes there are exhibited a modern French skull, two modern Kikuyu.

NOTES ON CULTURES:

We have as yet no positive evidence that the Wilton culture persisted in East Africa after the end of the Makalian post pluvial wet phase, but nevertheless, I am inclined to believe that we shall eventually find this to have been the case. At present we do not know what culture existed in East Africa during the succeeding dry period. Certainly, at this time large parts of the country became unsuitable to human occupation and equally certain, other parts were habitable.

On the shores of Victoria Nyanza, rich Wilton sites are found in many places. These sites usually, but by no means invariably, take the form of "shell mounds," and I suspect that this shell mound phase of culture is a somewhat later one than the form found in caves. This however remains to be proved or disproved. When we reach the second of the post-pluvial wet phases, the Nakuran, we are confronted with a series of Neolithic cultures all of which certainly belong to this point in the time scale, but none of which can be dated relative to the others.

Two of these cultures, to which the names Gumban A and Gumban B have been applied are without doubt derivatives of the Wilton, and they include certain tool-types characteristic of the Wilton. In addition however, they have other cultural objects, never found in a purely Wilton industry, and it is these objects which are the "type-tools" of these respective cultures.

The Gumban A has as its chief characteristic, a type of pottery which seems to be unique. Examples of nearly complete pots as well as pot fragments are exhibited in the Neolithic case. The pots of the Gumban A culture are decorated all over their external surface with intricate patterns recalling basket-work, while their interior surface is scored with irregular deep scratches made while the clay was still plastic. The reason for this curious custom is not known, but this style of pottery has not been found except with Gumban A culture, and may be taken as typical. It must not however be imagined that other simpler pots do not also occur, in which no internal scoring is present.

The Gumban B culture is chiefly characterised by its stone bowls some of which are but crudely shaped, whilst others are well finished. With these stone bowls are found stone pestles and mortars, and flake grinding stones, both of which suggest a knowledge of agriculture.

With the Gumban B culture too, on several occasions, beads have been found whose origin is Egyptian or Mesopotamian showing that the culture does not go back further than 1500 B.C. It would seem that traders came down to East Africa during the last stages of the stone-age and introduced agriculture and probably also eventually metal. The third Neolithic culture which I have provisionally named Njoroan is as yet very imperfectly known. The characteristic tools are polished stone axes of which some seven types have already been found in East Africa.

Until much further work has been done it remains impossible to say whether all of these types belong to a single culture or not. I suspect that they do and that variation is solely due to the varying ideas and individuality of the craftsmen who made them.

In conclusion let me indicate the distribution of the various cultures as at present known to us. I cannot, however, here give the full list of localities, nor can I say anything about the distribution in Uganda.

The Chellean and Acheulean and Mousterian culture types are known to us from the Coastal belt, Eastern Rift Valley zone, and the Sotik area, and the country surrounding Lake Victoria.

The Aurignacean culture has so far not been found in truly characteristic form outside the Eastern Rift Valley and its immediate surroundings. Certain localised variations of the later phases occur, however, in the Victoria Nyanza basin. The Stillbay culture has not been recorded from the Coast, but occurs over the rest of the country, as does the Elmenteitan and Wilton.

The Gumban A culture has not at present been recorded outside the Nakuru-Elmenteita basin while the Gumban B, is spread over the whole of the Rift Valley zones and also Sotik. Polished axes which are at present all classed together as Njoroan occur from the coast to the Victoria Nyanza but I do not know of any one site which has yielded more than three examples.

Any information as to sites which readers may obtain and which throws further light on the Stone Age cultures will be greatly appreciated and persons who make archaeological discoveries are asked to send their finds to the Coryndon Memorial Museum rather than to Museums elsewhere.