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A Note on The Limestone Caverns of Leba, Near Humpata, Angola

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At the conclusion of one of the Lowell Institute lectures which I delivered in Boston, Mass., U.S.A., in October, 1949, Mr. Merlin W. Ennis, of 63, North Hancock Street, Lexington 73, Mass., informed me that he had seen fossil apes similar to those of Taungs, Sterkstroom and Makapansgat about 15 years previously when he was a missionary in Angola. At the time he was visiting some friends in the Lubango district in the south-western portion of the colony at Humpata, a short distance south-west from Sá da Bandeira, the eastern terminus of the Mossamedes railway line.

One day his friends took him to Leba on a picnic to the lime caves (*eleva* means "cave") some of which had stalagmitic deposits of great beauty and where there was an extensive lime-burning industry. Hearing that fossils had frequently been found during the mining, he explored several of the bone-bearing quarries and visited the proprietors of the lime-kilns at Sá da Bandeira. They, unfortunately, were absent but a clerk exhibited to him a basket full of bone breccia containing two primate skulls. He then visited the local lyceum or high school, whose museum-cases contained a further two primate skulls amongst other fossil bones from the same deposits.

The circumstantial nature of the information given to me by Mr. Ennis, both in conversation and correspondence, caused me to communicate forthwith with various Angola residents whom he had recommended, and especially with Dr. J. Janmart, chief officer of the Prospecting Department in the Companhia de Diamantes de Angola. Those who had the good fortune to meet Dr. Janmart at the Nairobi Pan-African Prehistory Congress and have since that time studied his publications on the prehistory of Angola, will not be surprised

at the immediate courteous attention he gave to my inquiries. Amongst other things, he informed me that the calcareous region of Leba had twice been visited by the eminent Portuguese geologist, Professor Fernando Mouta, of the Polytechnic School in Lisbon, who had forwarded fossil material from the caves to Professor C. Arambourg, Director of the Palaeontology Laboratory in Paris, and that Dr. A. de Barros Machado, the well-known biologist employed by the diamond company, had done further collecting there only last year. Actually Dr. Machado specialises in the study of spiders and beetles. As he particularly interests himself in the blind cave-species, Dr. Janmart had recommended the Sá da Bandeira area to him and had asked him simultaneously to look for

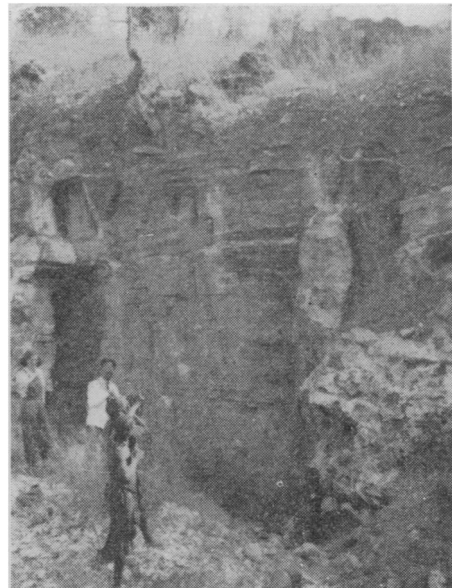


Figure 1

stone implements and fossils in the caves. In consequence, Dr. Janmart received from him last October a box of fossil breccia containing two more primate skulls and some Neolithic tools, the first so far to be discovered in Angola and, as yet, undescribed.

Acting on Dr. Janmart's advice, I immediately wrote to Dr. Machado and also to Professors Mouta and Arambourg, both of whom we had had the pleasure of meeting at the congress in Nairobi. From their courteous replies I am able to furnish the following particulars about the Leba (Humpata) deposits.

According to Professor Mouta the place where he collected the fossils is the site of an ancient cave, now without a roof but displaying over the walls and in fissures in the beds of limestone (their System Membe) a very hard breccia containing the fossil bones. The first of the three photographs kindly sent by Dr. Machado shows how comparable the Leba deposit is with our Transvaal and Bechuanaland sites. The native in the foreground is pointing towards the spot where the primate (probably baboon) skulls, seen in the other two pictures,



Figure 2



Figure 3

secured by Dr. Machado in 1949, were discovered.

The material sent to Professor Arambourg contained several skulls of young monkeys but, as yet, no anthropoids. They are skulls of baboons which he regards as belonging to a species of large size and perhaps identical with the *Dinopithecus ingeus*, described by Dr. Broom from the Schurverberg cave in the vicinity of Pretoria. The other animals accompanying these extinct baboons are ruminants and rodents and possibly (from the head of a humerus) a large feline of the sabre-toothed tiger type. Owing to his numerous other responsibilities, Professor Arambourg has not had time as yet to develop and describe fully the remains; but a monograph study will emerge in due course.

There is little question from these facts that the calcareous deposits of Leba (Humpata) are broadly comparable in age and fossil contents, as well as geological appearance, with those of Bechuanaland and the Transvaal. Their existence heightens the expectation of discovering further Australopithecine and

perhaps other proto-human types in the limestone deposits scattered across the broad continental belt that separates the Union from the Equator. The Makapansgat discovery extended the known range of these creatures to a point 400 miles north-eastward from Taungs; the Leba (Humpata) caverns suggest that there is every prospect of their being found more than 1,200 miles to the north-

west in Angola. Limestone caverns are not confined to the Union and Angola, they occur in the Rhodesias and the Belgian Congo. Members of the Archaeological Society who happen to be resident in localities where lime-workings are being exploited throughout Africa could render few more valuable services to our science than collecting the fossil refuse from these lime-manufacturing activities.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Rowley, H. H. FROM JOSEPH TO JOSHUA. *Biblical Traditions in the Light of Archaeology*. Oxford Univ. Press (for the British Academy). London, 1950, 12/6.

This volume contains the fortieth of the published series of Schweich lectures of the British Academy, and Mr. Rowley has here discussed certain problems of chronology. Biblical chronology is, at the best of times, beset with difficulties. The Massoretic Text yields figures vastly different from those of the Septuagint; all that, however, can never be completely cleared up, and what is more satisfying is to deduce from available evidence the comparative chronology of the Bible story and that of Egypt. What Pharaohs were in power during the sojourn of the Children of Israel? In this highly concentrated exegesis Mr. Rowley shows an amazing mastery of the first two books of the Pentateuch, and also of the appalling mass of literature that has grown up (like a modern Talmud) from their study.

He concludes that Joseph was taken to Egypt under Ikhnaton in about 1370 B.C., and that ten years later the Hebrews descended into Egypt. After sixty years the period of oppression set in under Rameses II. After a further ten years Moses was born, and at the age of thirty he fled to Jethro the Kenite, his future father-in-law and a kinsman to his mother. At the age of sixty (c. 1230 B.C.) Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt in the name of the Kenite God, Jahweh or Jehovah, and, by bringing the

Ten Commandments down the mountain, he initiated a new phase in Hebrew monotheism.

This work is certainly worthy of the careful study of those interested in the sparsely documented sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt, and successfully clears away much of the uncertainty of comparative dating that existed before.

A.J.H.G.

Beatrice Blackwood. *The Technology of a Modern Stone Age People in New Guinea*. *Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, Occ. Pap.* 3, 1950. 10/6.

This beautifully illustrated paper gives a clear and vivid account of the technology of the Nauti and Ekuti tribes of Central New Guinea. The making of the Papuan adze, the variety of angles at which it is set, both here and on other Pacific islands, the binding of the blade on to the intricate handle, and the use of the adze are all illustrated and described. It is interesting to note that, while the angle of the European metal adze to its shaft is between 70° and 90°, the stone adze is set at angles varying from 46° to 69°.

The making and fitting of a bored stone (here used as a club-head) is described in detail. Arrow-making, the shaping and stringing of bows, sawing with a thong, plaiting, string-making, etc., are given a place in this excellent work on stone-age technology.

The Papuans represent part of the eastern end of the "Negro Belt", and it is hardly surprising to find analogies with Africa.

A. G.