



SR's Book of the Week:

"THE SEVEN CAVES"

Author: Carleton S. Coon

By CLYDE KLUCKHOHN

UNTIL this week the reader who wished to inform himself about archeology had ordinarily to choose between popular compilations—some of them very good, others quite dreadful—and turgidly written monographs stuffed with a welter of detail which only the specialist could sort discriminatingly. The single outstanding example of a book of wide scope for a general audience by an eminent practising archeologist was Gordon Childe's "New Light on the Most Ancient East." Even this has its limitations, for Childe is detached and austere, and his readers are rewarded only if they have a rather passionate interest in history and archeology.

Now Carleton S. Coon, a leading archeologist, comes along with "The Seven Caves" (Knopf, \$5.75) and sets a new and very engaging pattern. He gives his readers plenty of facts, some of them dramatic, but interlaced with plenty of interpretations, some of them bold. His readers at the same time will be caught by Mr. Coon's contagious sense of adventure, will be disarmed by Coon's candid disclosure of his public announcement (and private communication to the Shah of Persia) of incorrect conclusions, and will be amused and instructed by the vivid tales of the public relations and personnel problems of the archeologist in the field.

For the public the book has an additional value. Archeologists have a habit of publishing their results ten or fifteen years after they have done their diggings. Mr. Coon's first excavation here reported took place only as long ago as 1939; his most recent finding was the determination, on June 6 last, of a date 43,000 years ago \pm 2,000 years. This is, incidentally, the oldest date thus far established for a site once occupied by human beings.

Mr. Coon begins his book with an explanation as to why some people dig caves. This is primarily a succinct and well-considered statement of the scientific reasons, but it includes a diverting excursus upon personal and indeed psychoanalytic motivations. Then follow chapters on seven caves he dug up on plateaus, desert, and the

Caspian shore of Arab lands from Tangier to Afghanistan. Each chapter covers the scientific context; the achievements, disappointments, and errors in excavation; the significance of the finds (sometimes a bit technically but intelligibly and pleasingly presented); the personal adventures of Professor Coon, his family and associates; the characters of such figures as Husain Ibish, One-Eyed Quasem, Big Absalem, and Inspectors Samadie and Mohammed Nader Khan. The final chapter fits the 150,000 pieces of flint and the human, seal, sheep, cattle, pig, horse, geese, and lion bones that he turned up in the seven caves into an overview of the 100,000 years of human history in the Middle East.

Mr. Coon also relates these Middle Eastern cultures—and still more the physical types associated or presumably associated with them—to the wider horizons of prehistory in Europe and the Far East. He considers himself a physical anthropologist—actually he is a representative of that waning species, the general anthropologist—and he disclaims full control of all the archeological specialties. I am not competent to assess the technical validity of all of his conclusions and interpretations but, in part on the authority of those Mr. Coon has con-

sulted and with whom he has collaborated, I would think that most of his positions are as sound as any anthropologist can reach at present.

MR. COON leans toward the theory that Neanderthal men evolved from their European predecessors, but in a different direction from the ancestors of modern European man. He refuses to separate race from culture completely. He argues that the various flint-working techniques could have been communicated from one group to another in Old Stone Age times only on the basis of personal contacts. And, he writes:

Once they had gone to this amount of trouble they certainly did more things with each other than chip flint . . . flint lessons were accompanied by race mixture. . . . Whoever the blade-makers were, they did not just teach a group of Neanderthals how to make blades and then skip away. They intermarried with the Neanderthals, and their hybrid children learned both techniques.

The book contains many excellent line drawings of flints, bones, stratigraphic sections, and the like. There are some good maps, though the location of the caves in relation to one another is not made as clear as one could wish. There are more than forty beautiful photographic plates, which are as interesting from the human as from the scientific point of view. This book is written in a consistently vigorous, though occasionally florid style. It should and certainly will reach many people who have never before done any serious reading on archeology.



—Dr. Philip Tobias.

Carleton S. Coon—" . . contagious sense of adventure."

Our Clever Ancestors

***"The Testimony of the Spade,"* by Geoffrey Bibby** (Knopf, 414 pp. \$6.75), reports on the findings of archeologists in northern Europe and shows what influence these findings had on our cultural heritage. James B. Griffin, our reviewer, is curator of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Michigan.

By James B. Griffin

THERE are two stories in Geoffrey Bibby's "The Testimony of the Spade." One is an excellent popular account of the major stages in the long and ever accelerating growth of human culture in Europe north of the Alps from the earliest appearance of man to the Viking period. The other presents biographical sketches of some of the archeologists of the last 100 years and more who have added their contribution to the documentation of man's rise from his dim and distant past. These sketches not only enliven the book but give some understanding of the personalities of representative archeologists.

Mr. Bibby is a professional archeologist, and his interpretations of the meaning and significance of prehistoric cultures and the ancient human interrelations between geographical areas are in essential agreement with those of other informed students of European prehistory. Throughout the book there is clear but unobtrusive evidence that Mr. Bibby has made profitable use of the voluminous scholarship in many languages by hundreds of contributors. He also displays the insight and understanding which can come only from personal participation in a field of knowledge. His style is clear, simple, and flows smoothly. He tells his story in a stimulating, but never sensationalized manner. He has avoided the technical terms and detailed descriptions by which archeologists communicate with one another but which are "jargon" to the uninitiated. This is definitely not a college text—it is too lively and entertaining for that.

Some of the highlights of "The Testimony of the Spade" are the accounts of the preserved bodies of ancient Danes, some of whom really had their hides tanned; of the excavation and interpretation of Stonehenge, the most

famous of the early pre-Christian "cathedrals" of England; and of the discovery of the magnificent wall paintings at Lascaux, the "Sistine Chapel" of fifteen millenniums ago in France.

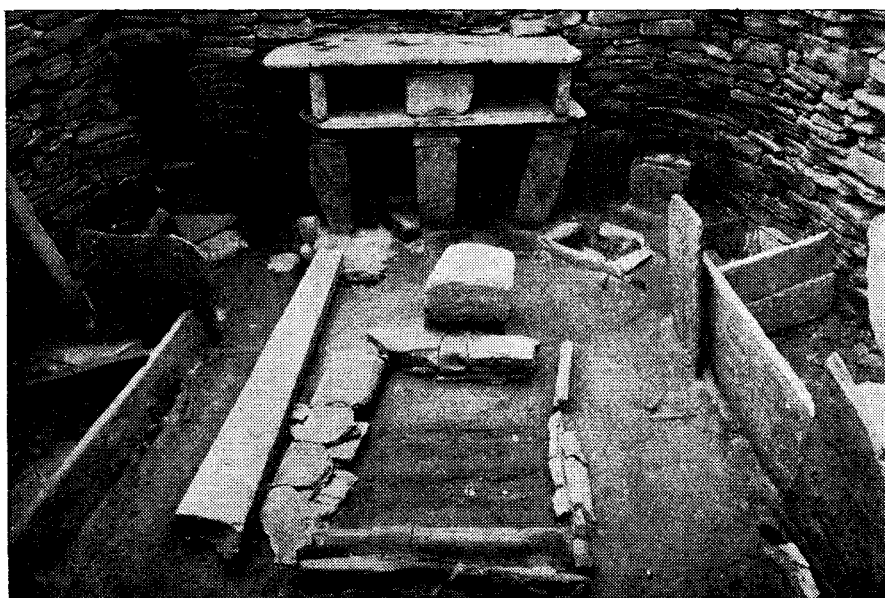
From these pages the reader can obtain a clear picture of the variety of peoples who have contributed their blood to every modern national area of northern Europe. Many Americans are direct descendants of these prehistoric and historic Europeans whose way of life is vividly portrayed. Thus the beliefs and practices of these people form part of our cultural heritage. While it is true that our modern Western society has a strong debt to the cultural developments of the Mediterranean area, our ties to the peoples of northern Europe are even more direct.

Throughout the volume Mr. Bibby emphasizes the principles and practices of scientific archeology, showing how geology, zoology, botany, physical anthropology—even nuclear physics—have contributed to the reading of the prehistoric record.

HE ALSO makes plain that archeological research is significant not merely in the recovery of past human products for display in museums nor in the reconstruction of an ancient human society placed in its proper chronological position nor in the increase in knowledge of man's long

rise to Parnassus. In Mr. Bibby's words, "The importance of the archeologist rests alone on his influence on the sum total of knowledge and feeling on which mankind bases its actions and reactions. One of the greatest advances of the past hundred years is that we have learned to see our achievements and problems in the perspective of a score of millennia full of achievements and problems, that we have assimilated into our consciousness the pride and humility of the realization that in times remote even by geological standards Europe was inhabited by men and women with an imagination and an artistic culture not inferior to our own, heirs even then to an unthinkably ancient way of life and way of thought." In a rational interpretation of man's history on earth the "spade" has become mightier than tradition, myth, and revelation.

It is only natural that a reader who belongs to the profession should find a number of statements and interpretations with which he disagrees. But on the whole the book is so sound in its factual data and so controlled in its presentation of the meaning of prehistory that minor quibbles over relative minutiae would be both unwise and unfair. If I have any major disappointment in this volume it is over the illustrations. In number, scope, and quality they are not comparable to the text. In spite of thirty-two fine plates, sixty drawings, eleven maps, and one chronology chart a more comprehensive portrayal of prehistoric products would have made possible a better realization by the lay reader of the several cultural stages Mr. Bibby presents in his always absorbing text.



—From "Testimony of the Spade."

Furnished House, Skara Brae—"... man's rise from his dim and distant past."