

# Sciences Cooperate to Study Mayas

*Anthropology—Archæology*

## Carnegie Institution Calls on Many Specialists

**S**PECIALISTS representing many branches of science are being called into consultation to help archaeologists explain the remarkable Mayan civilization which flourished in America before the coming of Columbus.

For fifteen years the Carnegie Institution of Washington has been digging up and restoring Mayan temples and palaces in the jungle country of Yucatan and Guatemala. Carved writings were left by the learned Indians who once conquered the American tropics and these have been studied.

To aid in interpreting its finds, the Carnegie Institution is now calling upon medical men, weather experts, specialists in tropical plants and animal life, anthropologists who

can take precise measurements of modern descendants of the Mayas, psychologists, geographers, and aviators. Dr. A. V. Kidder, directing archaeological work for the Carnegie Institution, is engaged in synthesizing the various lines of activity.

Descendants of the once distinguished Mayan line make up the bulk of the population of Yucatan today. A joint project of Harvard and the Carnegie Institution has measured and studied 1,800 living Indians in Yucatan. This will show the present physical type of these people who have been living under tropical conditions for so many centuries. Linked with medical studies, it will show their susceptibility to various diseases.

One key-problem in the Mayan

enigma is to trace the time and place at which corn was first tamed, so that it became a grain crop. It was this important agricultural advance which made it possible for Indian groups to settle down as farmers and to build towns and have leisure for the arts and sciences. It is now believed that the wild plant *teocentli* was first crossed with some unknown plant to produce maize somewhere in the highlands of Mexico. Specialists in plant heredity are studying the rate of development of recent varieties of corn as one link in the chain of needed evidence.

Dr. F. M. Gaige of the University of Michigan has begun to investigate the animals and plants of Yucatan, hoping to learn more about the food of the ancient Mayas, and the materials they drew on for useful articles and for their fine arts.

Thorough investigation of the homeland of the Mayas will not only clear up puzzles of how the Mayas accomplished so many remarkable things in a tropical region that has returned to its original jungle state, but the evidence unearthed will benefit modern inhabitants of the tropics, it is hoped.

Summing up researches in Yucatan that are focussed on the Mayan civilization, Dr. Kidder cited: Studies of Mayan language by the University of Chicago; biological reconnaissance by the University of Michigan; ethnological reconnaissance by the University of Chicago, all in their first year of work; records of the clinic at Chichen Itza, now in its third year; medical survey of Yucatan by Harvard University, in its second year; survey of pottery in the Mayan area, just started; researches of the hieroglyphics of the Mayas by Dr. S. G. Morley, of the Carnegie Institution, which have continued for twenty-five years; excavations at Uaxactun in Guatemala and at Chichen Itza in Yucatan by the Carnegie Institution.

Proposed activities discussed by the cooperating scientists include the re-translation of the native chronicles; air survey of the Mayan area; and surveys of the geology, climate and farming conditions.

## Scientists Differ Over Peking Skull

*Anthropology*

**T**HE skull of Peking Man, *Sinanthropus pekinensis*, unearthed near Peiping last winter, promises to become a very literal bone of contention among scientists. Dr. Davidson Black of Peking Union Medical College, who first described the specimen, has now cleared the entire exterior of the mass of travertine limestone in which it was embedded, and in communications received in this country reaffirms his stand that the skull represents an entirely new genus of human beings. American anthropologists still hesitate to agree with him.

After examination of certain parts of the skull newly laid bare, especially the region about the ear, Dr. Black expressed the opinion that "here for the first time among hominids a stage of development is manifest which is much more archaic than that obtaining in Neanderthal Man while at the same time it presents features recalling the relations characterizing this region in anthropoids (e. g. Chimpanzee)."

Dr. Black concludes with the opinion that Peking Man presents pre-Neanderthaloid characteristics, and that the genus is not far removed from the common ancestral type from which both Neanderthal man and modern man evolved.

Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, physical an-

thropologist of the Smithsonian Institution, differs sharply from this view, which would make Peking Man much older than, and possibly ancestral to, the race of Neanderthal. After examining a full set of photographs of the skull which he has just received from Prof. Black, he declared that he could not see the difference between the new specimen and the recognized Neanderthals of Europe.

The top view of the skull is especially suggestive, Dr. Hrdlicka declared. The silhouette of the cranium from this point of view shows the distinct narrowing toward the forehead, with the sudden and pronounced flare of the massive eyebrow ridges, that are found developed to this degree only in Neanderthal skulls.

"Put this skull in a collection from Europe," Dr. Hrdlicka said, "and I believe every student of early man would declare it a specimen of the Neanderthal type. Such variations as it shows from other skulls of this species are the kind of thing one might find among individuals of any race. Until we have much more evidence I am still unable to see that we are justified in classing it as a new species, much less as a new genus."

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