

behavioral sciences

ARCHAEOLOGY

Oldest New World pyramid

What seems to be the oldest pyramid in the New World has been located in southeastern Mexico, on the island of La Venta. The pyramid, a cone-shaped giant mound of clay, has been familiar to archaeologists for years, but they thought it concealed a somewhat ordinary pyramid.

Anthropologist Robert Heizer, of the University of California at Berkeley, with his colleagues and Mexican workers discovered its significance only this year. The pyramid was built around 800 B.C., by the Olmec people, supposedly the first civilized Indian culture in the New World.

The Olmec pyramid is unlike any other Mesoamerican pyramid and is smaller than the great rectangular structures built by other ancient Mexicans, such as the Teotihuacan. Nevertheless, it would fill the Berkeley Memorial Stadium, stands 100 feet tall and spreads to 420 feet in diameter at the base.

Dr. Heizer believes the pyramid represents a volcanic cone.

DRUG USE

Vietnamese marijuana

The Vietnamese war is surely the first in which the Army has been more concerned with marijuana than with venereal disease, says a psychiatrist who served with the Army Medical Corps.

From 30 to 50 percent of the troops have smoked pot at least once while in Vietnam, says Dr. John A. Talbott, who spent a year with a neuropsychiatric team in Vietnam.

Psychotic reactions seem to be more common with Vietnamese marijuana than with the U.S. variety, possibly because of higher resin concentration. Also it often contains other drugs such as opiates. About 50 percent of the pot samples tested included other substances. Reactions to pot constituted from one to five percent of the psychiatric admissions.

Soldiers with pot reactions seemed quite similar in personality to those World War II soldiers who developed psychoses attributed to combat fatigue, says Dr. Talbott in *THE BULLETIN*, published by the New York branch of the American Psychiatric Association.

Alcohol, meanwhile, is still a potent force in the adjustment or maladjustment of men at war, he says. "DTs are commonplace and belligerent drunks crowd the wounded in emergency rooms."

DRUG ADDICTION

Methadone endorsed

Because of the success so far demonstrated with methadone treatment of heroin addicts, a Columbia University evaluation team has recommended that the program be expanded. New York State has been running an experiment with methadone for about four years under the direction of Drs. Vincent Dole and Marie Nyswander.

Some 544 addicts have been treated through the pro-

gram at Beth Israel Medical Center. The program dropped or lost 10 to 14 percent of these addicts, but none who stayed has been readdicted to heroin. Methadone is a substitute narcotic that blocks the craving for heroin. While patients must be maintained on the drug daily, they do not experience the euphoric and toxic effects of heroin.

When they were admitted, only 28 patients had jobs; after two years 85 percent are employed or in school. Originally, 40 percent were dependent on welfare, now only 15 percent are.

Columbia's school of public health now recommends that other facilities begin methadone treatment and that the drug be tested on other patient groups, particularly younger addicts and prisoners.

EVOLUTION

A timetable for mammals

Geologists are undertaking a massive project to date the volcanic beds of mountains near Santa Fe, N.M. When the dating is completed in three years it will add greatly to knowledge of mammalian evolution.

The Sangre de Cristo mountains are the source of the largest collection of vertebrate fossils ever assembled, including extinct horses, camels, rhinos, deer and other animals with no living counterpart. Precise dating of the volcanic ash will provide a framework for knowing when evolutionary changes took place and at what rate. The era from 8 million to 16 million years ago was a period of great mammal development, particularly of grazing animals.

With the new timetable, geologists can observe changes in teeth, limb and brain size as animals adapted themselves to their environment over millions of years. University of Pennsylvania geologists are doing the dating.

PSYCHIATRY

Presidential assassins

Nine assassins have been involved in eight known attempts on the lives of American Presidents. They were all Caucasian males, aged 24 to 40; all were shorter than average and each had some grievance that was obsessional or even delusional in intensity.

Because of the inadequacy and distractibility of these men, two Stanford psychiatrists believe that some action can be taken to reduce the danger of assassination. They suggest, for a start, that Presidents be prohibited by law from mixing with crowds where their presence has been publicized in advance. This does not mean Presidents must be restricted to television, say Drs. Robert L. Taylor and Alfred E. Weisz.

Another reasonable block to assassination would be a required waiting period between weapon sales and possession.

The psychiatrists disagree with sentiment once expressed by the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy when he said, "There is no sense worrying about those things. If they want you, they can get you."

The character of assassins suggests that certain blocks would be reasonable approaches to prevention, they say.

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