

ARCHAEOLOGY

Excavations In Mexico

Enormous stone heads and monuments of mysterious origin discovered. The basalt from which they were made is not native to the section.

See Front Cover

► FIVE COLOSSAL stone heads, one frowning and the others placidly viewing the world, have been brought to light in the jungles of southern Mexico.

These newly-discovered great stone heads were found among the remains of a prehistoric Indian ceremonial center excavated this spring by an expedition of the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution.

"These gigantic heads represent the best group of monuments we have ever found," Dr. Matthew W. Stirling of the Smithsonian Institution, expedition leader, stated upon his return. Although similar to other basalt heads found by the expedition in previous seasons, these found in the archaeological site known as San Lorenzo are better preserved and have finer carvings.

The picture on the front cover of this SCIENCE NEWS LETTER from the National Geographic Society, shows the first colossal head taken out by the expedition. It is classed as a number one head and is one of the two largest, measuring nine feet in length. This head is one of the best made and best preserved of the La Venta type. Dr. Stirling and Dr. Drucker are standing beside the head.

Word that a colossal stone head was in this region reached the expedition at work in Chiapas, through friendly natives. A comparatively new village had grown up in the section, and in cutting a trail, the natives stumbled across a fallen head six to eight inches below the surface. As stone was not often found in this region, the natives curiously scraped off the top soil. A stone eye looked up at them. By the time the expedition reached the site last year, another basalt head had been unearthed by the natives. Several other large ones were located, but no excavation was done at that time.

This spring the expedition unearthed 24 monuments within an area of only a square mile. Some are ten feet high and weigh an estimated 40 or 50 tons; others are little more than life size and weigh but a few hundred pounds. They were all found several miles from the tiny vil-

lage responsible for their discovery.

None of the gigantic stone heads, however, were in the place they had been set up originally. Succeeding generations of natives who did not regard them with the same awe as their creators had probably rolled them into ravines or hollows to get them out of the way.

Little is known about the history of the gigantic figures or who they represent. Another mystery is how they got to this site along the Rio Chiquito, about 60 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The basalt from which they were carved did not come from that section, but must have been quarried at least 75 miles to the north. The San Lorenzo community is believed to have existed between 500 and 800 A. D. It is one of three major sites representing the La Venta civilization under investigation during the last few years.

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MEDICINE

New Better Epilepsy Medicines Coming

► NEW AND better medicines for epilepsy are coming, Dr. Jerry C. Price of the Neurological Institute, New York, declared when he appeared as guest of Watson Davis, director of Science Service, on the Adventures in Science program over CBS.

First of the new medicines coming to help the 750,000 epileptics in the nation is mesantoin. This will be on the market soon, Dr. Price stated. It is a sister drug of the hydantoin series which includes phenytoin sodium, commonly known as dilantin. Like dilantin, mesantoin controls convulsions in "grand mal", the big illness epilepsy, but it does not cause swelling of the gums as dilantin does in some patients, especially children.

Next to come as epilepsy remedies may be chemicals of the enzyme class which play important parts in body chemistry. The possibility of using these as epilepsy remedies appears especially significant because they may directly attack the cause of epilepsy, whereas other chemicals only check the convulsions which are a symptom of the disease.

Development of an enzyme attack on epilepsy goes back to the glutamic acid treatment introduced in 1942 by Dr. Price and Drs. Heinrich Waelsch and Tracy J. Putnam at the Neurological Institute. Subsequently, Dr. David Nachmansohn, of Yale, found that glutamic acid was linked to acetylcholine metabolism. Acetylcholine had been previously shown to cause convulsions. Dr. Nachmansohn has since discovered the enzyme and co-enzyme systems of acetylcholine metabolism.

"The chemical structures of these enzymes," Dr. Price said, "indicate the enzyme may be used in the treatment of grand mal and the co-enzyme in the treatment of petit mal types of epilepsy."

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