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978-0-521-13474-3 - The Ancient Inhabitants of Jebel Moya (Sudan)

Ramkrishna Mukherjee, C. Radhakrishna Rao and J. C. Trevor

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY

III

THE ANCIENT INHABITANTS OF
JEBEL MOYA (*SUDAN*)

The Wain upon the northern steep
Descends and lifts away.
Oh I will sit me down and weep
For bones in Africa.

A. E. HOUSMAN

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(*SUDAN*)

BY

RAMKRISHNA MUKHERJEE

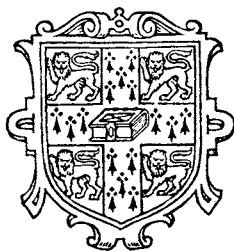
C. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

&

J. C. TREVOR

With appendices by

FRANK ADDISON AND THE AUTHORS



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To

DOUGLAS ERITH DERRY

PRASANTA CHANDRA MAHALANOBIS

MIRIAM LOUISE TILDESLEY

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PREFACE

In 1946 the Trustees of the Estate of the late Sir Henry S. Wellcome, F.R.S., submitted a collection of human remains, together with the field records relating to them, for study in the Duckworth Laboratory, University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge. The material, which can be assigned to the first millennium B.C., was excavated between 1911 and 1914 at Jebel Moya in the Southern Sudan, and a full account of its archaeological context has now been published.* Unfortunately, it had been stored for some three decades in and near London before being sent to Cambridge, with the result that the greater part disintegrated beyond hope of repair and to such an extent that not a tenth of what was originally recovered still survives.

Sir Henry, in his will, had assigned the preparation of a report on the Jebel Moya skeletons to Sir Arthur Keith, who for various reasons was unable to accept the charge. Later the task was entrusted to Dr G. M. Morant, assisted by Dr Otto Samson. The war interrupted these arrangements, and at its conclusion neither Dr Morant nor Dr Samson was free to continue with them. I was then approached to act in their stead, but since my time was severely limited the Trustees generously assented to a proposal that two pupils of Professor P. C. Mahalanobis, Messrs Mukherjee and Rao, should come to England from India and work on the problem under my direction. Mukherjee had received his previous anthropological training under Professor K. P. Chattopadhyay of Calcutta University, and Rao, while primarily a statistician, had collaborated with Professors Majumdar and Mahalanobis in a monograph on the Anthropometric Survey of the United Provinces which has since appeared in *Sankhyā*.†

As, in addition to the surviving skulls and post-cranial bones, we had nearly 1500 cards containing both anthropometric and anthroposcopic data recorded in the field by three different observers or teams of observers over as many seasons of excavation, namely, the second, the third and the fourth, the material appeared at first sight to constitute a sample of almost unprecedented size for the study of human skeletons from a single locality. In the event, our hopes proved unfounded. With the exception of the series which Professor Douglas E. Derry sexed and measured during the second season, we regretfully decided that we could rely neither on the sex assigned nor on the measurements taken by the field anthropologists.

* Addison (1949).

† Mahalanobis, Majumdar & Rao (1949).

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The original sexing, apart from that of Professor Derry, showed a great preponderance of women over men, a finding which is the basis of certain of Mr Addison's conclusions in regard to the wearing of personal ornaments and the nature of the settlement at Jebel Moya.* Far from affording support to the field anthropologists' general contention that the females outnumbered the males by two to one, our results indicate—we believe quite unequivocally—that the sexes were not in fact so grossly disproportionate. Two kinds of evidence were available to settle the question, (i) the field cards which included estimates of the sex of over a thousand individuals, and (ii) such remains as had escaped the hazards of more than thirty peripatetic years and were sufficiently intact to be resexed in the tranquillity of a Cambridge laboratory. Of the last, some tell their tale firmly and some faintly, but it is a different tale from that of the field cards for seasons other than the second.

The field measurements were exhaustively analysed in the hope of supplementing the meagre but more reliable data obtained from the bones studied in the laboratory. Here, too, alas, it was found that only the fruits of Professor Derry's work in the second season could profitably be used. The reasons for this are discussed in the text, but in fairness to our colleagues it should be said that the many disadvantages under which they laboured during the third and, more especially, the fourth seasons at Jebel Moya would try the skill of the hardest.

The scheme we contemplated was, briefly, to undertake a routine laboratory examination of all reasonably preserved adult specimens, to analyse the measurements and other observations recorded by the field anthropologists, and (in the light of our results) to determine as far as possible the relationship of the ancient Jebel Moyans to other African types. With this in mind, the different phases of the present study have been treated in the following sequence. The introductory first chapter provides a description of the excavations at Jebel Moya and states the anthropological problems to which they give rise; the second chapter is concerned with the reliability of both the field sexing and measurements and to what extent they may be compared with the sex assigned and the measurements taken in the laboratory; the anthroposcopic data obtained from the field records are considered in the third chapter; the fourth chapter deals with the nature and characteristics of the Jebel Moya population, and the fifth chapter with its racial affinities; finally, an attempt is made in the sixth chapter to relate our material to what little is known of the physical anthropology of the Sudan. Subjects

* As Addison (1949), p. 37*n.*, remarks, however, 'It is obvious that the validity of all these depends ultimately on the accuracy with which the skeletons were sexed'. With no small temerity, a quantitative analysis of some of the cultural traits of the Jebel Moyans has been made by one of us in Appendix III.

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demanding a more extended technical discussion than seemed appropriate in the text and detailed tables of measurements have been relegated to appendices.

This investigation has been essentially a co-operative effort, and whatever credit attaches to its accomplishment extends far beyond the contributions of each one of us. We should like in the first place to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Wellcome Trustees for their generous financial assistance while the research was in progress and for subsidizing the cost of its publication. Our gratitude is also due to Mr Frank Addison, F.S.A., Professor Douglas E. Derry, Professor P. C. Mahalanobis, F.R.S., Dr G. M. Morant, Dr H. Mulhall, Miss M. L. Tildesley, M.B.E., Mrs T. K. Trevor, and Professor H. V. Vallois for advice on and help with various problems that have arisen in the course of it. Professor A. M. Batrawi kindly allowed us to consult an advance proof of Part I of his admirable survey of the racial history of Egypt and Nubia; Mr G. I. Jones, with his usual generosity, put at our disposal the unpublished measurements of a series of skulls from Nigeria; Mr C. B. Denston and Miss M. J. Fereday gave much practical assistance in the laboratory; Dr Wilfred D. Hambly and Dr M. B. Ray replied to a number of tedious questions regarding the anthropometric techniques employed during the third and fourth seasons at Jebel Moya; and Mrs Brenda Z. Seligman and her publishers Messrs Kegan Paul consented to the quotation of several passages from the Seligmans' classic work, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*.

J. C. TREVOR

Cambridge

ADDENDUM, APRIL 1954

As the quatrain from 'Astronomy' in Housh's *Last Poems* below the half-title sufficiently indicates, the Jebel Moya remains did not spare, to the bitter end, the feelings of those who had worked on them. When this book was in page proof, a mistake in the technique of measuring the tibial lengths was detected by chance. Measurements were accordingly retaken on the bone and their constants again determined. All seemed well until the senior author (J.C.T.) started to apply new stature reconstruction formulae, which had in the meantime been published, to the means. The results left no doubt that several things were still awry, that yet another examination of the tibiae was essential, and that it must be made by himself. Time for such an exasperating task was somehow found, and, with the aid of his wife, he managed to complete it. The revision has rather naturally necessitated certain departures from the original scheme, but it is hoped that all will be in a positive direction. Six lengths of the bone, corresponding to characters that are still recorded by different schools of anthropometricians, will consequently now be presented, and the number could have been increased by at least another three if leisure had allowed.

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PLATE I



SITE 100 AT JEBEL MOYA (THE FIRST SEASON'S EXCAVATIONS)