

## Reviews

*World Prehistory: A New Outline.* By Grahame Clark. Cambridge University Press, 1969. U.K. price: 45s (cloth), 18s (paper).

UNIVERSAL 'World Histories' seem to have only limited prestige, so what then may be expected of a modest 330 pages on a fairly obscure subject like prehistory? The short answer is that this is a remarkable book and, judging by the success of the first edition, which is widely read not only in its homeland and in the United States, but also in the Soviet Union, it fulfils an important rôle. Therefore, in a review for the *New Zealand Journal of History*, some space must be given to its wider relevance, as well as to a more academic evaluation.

There can be no very satisfactory thumbnail definition of prehistory; indeed, as might be expected, there is great controversy over whether it is history, anthropology or biology, arguments which only transfer the onus of definition on to other over-crowded terms. Prehistorians are concerned with man, ranging in scope from his imperceptible divergence from the other primates, to his perceptible appearance in written records. What is characteristic of the subject is the nature of its evidence, material remains of manufactures and accidentally surviving indirect clues to actions. The way this evidence is interpreted is open to as many different approaches as are the activities of modern man. Prehistory is an intensely interesting academic subject because of the variety of its interpretations and because of its strong element of discovery, but, as Professor Clark points out, it has a deep relevance to beliefs and behaviour in our present time. Ideas of racial supremacy, based on supposedly evolutionary evidence and the 'primitiveness' of some peoples are seen to be meaningless in the time dimension of prehistory (p. 3). Grahame Clark has an honourable history of bringing his subject to bear on such issues. His *Archaeology and Society*, first published in 1939, attacked the perverted use of the past made by the Nazis, at a time when some of his colleagues still ignored the issues.

Prehistory is not a subject taught in New Zealand schools, though it merits a General Certificate examination in England. But wherever it is studied, the majority of those commencing on it must suddenly come to terms with both a mass of novel information and the systems of thought by which it is articulated. *World Prehistory* is probably the best concise introduction available. This is achieved by a spare but authoritative outline of the available area prehistories, emphasizing the ideas which organize them into a consistent whole. This is where the book becomes interesting to the professional scholar, because through the author's active personal contacts with many of the branches of his subject, one may observe some major theoretical changes taking place. Inevitably there is some inconsistency, and I suspect that the sheer vigour of the American schools is rather underplayed; but by and large one may distinguish between the chapters, such as the first four, in which the emphasis is on ideas, and some

of those that follow, where there is a far greater weight on the more traditional, descriptive accounts of prehistory. Indeed, I feel that this new edition marks a watershed in our subject. If the critical questioning of established ideas which is apparent in some branches of prehistory, notably the Old Stone Age and the origins of farming, spreads to others we might anticipate a very different third edition.

The first two chapters are devoted to the discovery, age and characteristics of early man. They reveal some of the most active areas of discovery, like Dr. Leakey's finds of fossils at Olduvai in East Africa, and the concurrent upsurge of research on primate behaviour. Clark draws attention to the controversial implications of the scientific naming of these early fossils and, correctly I think, avoids siding either with the Leakey camp or with its powerful critics. The third and fourth chapters discuss the sophisticated societies of the Advanced Palaeolithic and the beginnings of farming. This latter chapter is probably the most stimulating and controversial of the whole book, for it exposes the weaknesses which are beginning to be seen in the concept of the 'Agricultural Revolution', a phrase, coined by V. Gordon Childe, which has influenced thinking far outside prehistory for over a generation. By comparison, chapters five, six and seven are much more traditional, though no less useful. They recount the development of urban societies in the Near East and the origins and growth of European civilization. I suspect that these subjects would look very different in ten years' time, for the intricate weaving of prehistoric 'cultures', another legacy of Gordon Childe's, seems due for re-evaluation. The remaining five chapters are regional prehistories of Africa, India, Eastern Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Of these the descriptions of the relatively young archaeology of Australia and the Pacific are likely to interest New Zealand readers. Australian Prehistory has suffered in the past, partially because the contemporary Aborigines have offered a more immediate field for study, and not a little from the dogma of Malinowskian social anthropology. But it has now suddenly come into its own, because the boundaries between exclusive disciplines are no longer recognized by all, and because the Australian time-scale is now seen to be leaping back into the past. As Clark observes in a footnote to the area's radiocarbon dates (p. 260), there are now grounds for believing in a span in excess of thirty thousand years.

Polynesia, and New Zealand in particular, are accorded considerably more attention than in the first edition. This must be due to the author's first-hand experience and may reflect a rise in the status of work in the area. It is sufficient to note here that Polynesia is presented in an orthodox fashion and that a newcomer to the subject would find a useful guide to the evidence and kinds of problem of the area.

Inevitably, a work of this scope cannot escape criticism from the specialists in all the areas it encompasses. For example, I would dearly like to know the source of the evidence for the transport of plant foods from the North to the South Islands of New Zealand, in exchange for articles like greenstone (p. 268). This looks a little too Melanesian. It is the nature of the subject that however cautiously one may traverse other's territories, violations will be noticed, and Professor Clark is not always cautious. On a different level, I note some haste in publication, for there are confusing omissions and misprints, e.g. concentrations of Acheulian sites should be round rivers and [lakes] (p. 41). The radiocarbon date NPL43 for the Oranian at Haua Fteah given as  $1,800 \pm 173$  B.C. (p. 205) should be

10,800±173 B.C. — a serious error to my mind, just because it is all too easy to accept this as a vagary of radiocarbon. On the other hand, Koonalda cave's position '17 kilometres' below the Nullarbor plain (p. 253) merely suggests that Britain is in for serious trouble when it finally plunges into decimalization. Otherwise the book is well printed and the maps and tables of radiocarbon dates are particularly useful. There were occasions when I felt that a newcomer to the subject would have wanted illustrations of sites and tools, but given the necessary restrictions on size, the half-tone plates of prehistoric man, seen almost entirely through the eyes of ancient artists, are most attractive. It is probably only a personal taste, but the skull of Peking man looks excessively like what it is, a plaster reconstruction. The amazing advanced Palaeolithic engraved portrait from La Marche deserves to be added to the gallery. When all such comments have been made, the fact remains that the new outline of *World Prehistory* is a very valuable book and I think the reason is basic: its author is exceptionally good at judging the values of prehistory.

WILFRED SHAWCROSS

*University of Auckland*

*The Traditional Trade of Asia.* By C. G. F. Simkin. Oxford University Press, London, 1968. Pp. xiii, 417. Plates, Statistical and Chronological Tables, Bibliography, Maps and Index. U.K. price: 50s.

THE TASK OF writing a book of this title is obviously monumental. There is no definition of period except that hidden in the elusive word 'traditional', and no limitation of the area save the general term 'Asia'. The title also engenders great expectations of a new line of interpretation or a new emphasis to the already known facts and developments. Questions of sources also spring to mind: have new ones been tapped, or known ones in inaccessible languages been used?

The first three chapters deal with the early developments of Asian trade routes of commercial movement from pre-Christian times to the period immediately prior to the coming of the Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century. The text is very much of a narrative and has an emphasis on presentation of the facts in chronological order in their proper political setting. It is hurried, as if it is a shortened version of a longer manuscript. All the chapters begin and end abruptly without summation or introduction, and dealing with the trade partners country by country gives a rather broken narrative. Chapter IV deals with the coming of the Europeans up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the Asian reaction. The sources available are more abundant; the author seems more at ease with the subject and the interpretative patches increase in frequency. But it is still rather hurried and uneven. The Spaniards and Portuguese are given summary treatment; on the other hand the English and the Dutch are given much stronger representation. There is still as much political history as trade history and at the end one still wonders what the author wants to say that is new and what he means by 'traditional'. But it is obvious that much careful and hard work has gone into these four chapters.