PREFACE

The Prehistory of India and Pakistan is still in the early stages of study. So far the exploration has been conducted very unevenly and the result has mostly given us a description of tool types recovered from such searches. Barring a few exceptions, no serious attempt has been made to study the geological context within which the different tools were produced and to reconstruct the environmental background in which early man lived in this sub-continent. We can hardly visualise at present the changing pattern of the geography and geology of this vast land mass when man evolved from early stone age to later periods of tool manufacture. The environmental reconstruction of Burkitt and Cammiade in South East India is a hypothetical proposition which needs exact correlation with geological phases. De Terra’s attempt to define geological periods in the Potwar has been questioned by Prof. F. E. Zeuner, and Zeuner’s own reconstruction in Gujarat lacks detail and remains to be supplemented by further analysis of the materials. In Eastern India N. K. Bose has tried to study the implementiferous beds of the Burhabalanga, but the result is still far from satisfactory. Consequently the geo-chronology in this sub-continent still remains to be established. In the present state of our knowledge only a general geographical and geological background can be given. On the other hand, the stone tools in this sub-continent have been studied mainly on the basic terminology evolved in European and African contexts. The attempt of H. L. Movius to evolve terms like, Chopper-chopping tools, Scrapers and Hand Adzes for the Eastern Asiatic tool types is hardly satisfactory. But as long as a comprehensive independent enquiry into the problem of the stone-industry of this sub-continent, based on the nature of the raw-material available here is not made, a researcher in a limited field has to make the most of the given opportunities. It is against this background that the first three chapters of this book have been written. The main idea throughout has been to provide an earlier background to the main part of the thesis which deals with the neolithic problem in Eastern India and South East Asia.
However, a review of the excavated material has definitely proved that the palaeolithic complex of Eastern India is fundamentally different from the so-called “Chopper-chopping” tool tradition of Eastern Asia. The microlithic industry of this region, which Col. D. H. Gordon vaguely suggested was “Chalcolithic” in character of the type that he noticed at Maski and Brahmagiri, or even in the Deccan trap area, is not borne out by a detailed analysis of the available material. This conclusion is confirmed by the recent excavation of B. B. Lal at Birbhanpur, but at the same time the latter’s inference that the non-geometric character of the Birbhanpur industry should argue for a very early date is hardly tenable, as it is based on the assumption of Gordon’s conclusion. The microlithic complex of Eastern India is peripheral, and it is this context which should ultimately decide its chronology.

The neolithic cultures in this sub-continent at present centre round the study of stone tools. The basic tool here is what has been termed “the pointed butt axe”—a median edged cutting tool which has its edge parallel to the haft. The adze-type with bevelled cutting edge perpendicular to the haft is not known to India except in the late context, and that again is limited to Eastern India. There are two types of this adze—the facetted and the shouldered tools—exactly identical with similar specimens in South East Asia where they occur at a time when developed neolithic complex has spread its influence from the river-valley cultures of the Chinese mainland. The Indian adzes are no doubt an off-shoot of this cultural movement, but there is nothing to support the view that the whole neolithic complex of this sub-continent is indebted to China. This conclusion is borne out by a detailed analysis of the materials given in the chapters dealing with the neolithic cultures.

The work, as a whole, was mainly completed in the early part of 1955 and submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of London. Later on I altered and added some portions in order to bring the main part up-to-date, the most important being the excavations at Gua Cha in Malaya and those at Birbhanpur in West Bengal. It is unfortunate that I could not take evidence from the neolithic cultures of the Indonesian islands—a subject which has now been summarised by Van Heekeren in Stone Age in Indonesia. Similarly, Cheng Tek’un’s thesis on Archaeological Studies in Szechwan has now been published but
I have not been able to utilize it for this book. It is hoped that these deficiencies will be met in future edition, if at all it will be in demand.

The work was done under the general supervision of Prof. K. de B. Codrington when I was working in the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. To him I am greatly obliged for all that he did in seeing my thesis through. But it is mainly the lectures of Prof. F. E. Zeuner on Prehistory that I had the good fortune to attend and which inspired me to write this thesis. I am most obliged to him for going through my second chapter and allowing me to work in his laboratory. I am also indebted to Dr. F. R. Allchin and Mr. A. H. Christie for their general help and criticism of many points raised in the thesis. Col. D. H. Gordon was good enough to let me have his detailed criticism, in the light of which I have revised some of the opinions stated originally in the thesis. I am also obliged to Prof. A. L. Basham for his kindly going through my first chapter. I shall be failing in my duty if I do not recall my indebtedness to Sir. R. E. Mortimer Wheeler, who was my first teacher in archaeology and whose contact has left a profound influence in my life.

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