



COON, CARLETON STEVENS

COON, CARLETON STEVENS (b. Wakefield, Massachusetts, 23 June 1904, d. Gloucester, Massachusetts, 4 June 1981), American anthropologist and educator. Coon was educated at Harvard University, where he took his Ph.D. degree in anthropology in 1928 and also taught anthropology from 1927 to 1948. Between 1925 and 1934 he conducted fieldwork in North Africa, the Balkans, Ethiopia, and Arabia. In 1948 he left Harvard to become professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania and curator of general ethnology at the University Museum. Beginning in the next year, he conducted excavations in Persia, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Coon published numerous general works on anthropology (Chapple and Coon, 1942; Coon, 1948, 1954, 1971) and on the ethnography of Islamic peoples from Morocco to Afghanistan (1931, 1951a). His interest in the origin of races (1962, 1965) and fossil man led him to undertake in 1949 the first systematic search for Paleolithic remains in Persia (Coon, 1951b). During this project he carried out excavations at the Hunters' Cave (Ġār-e ƙar [see Comment]) at **Bīsotūn**, at Tamtama Cave near Urmia (formerly Režā'īya) in Azarbaijan, and at Khunik (Ƙonik) Cave near Bīrjand in Khorasan (1957). The latter two caves yielded a few atypical Mousterian artifacts and the one at Bīrjand also some animal bones indicating that it had been used as a warm-weather hunting site. The Hunters' Cave produced a full range of the Mousterian stone-tool industry in association with bones of gazelles, red deer, and equids (onagers?), as well as a fragment of a human arm bone (called "Neanderthaloid" by Coon). The site, located above the famous Bīsotūn spring, was probably a camping spot for



hunters. In 1992 this site was still the only full published Paleolithic excavation site in Persia (Smith). Coon concluded in 1957 that the Persian plateau had probably been an area of transit, rather than an area for emergence of the earliest Upper Paleolithic. It appears that Persia had already assumed the role it has continued to play ever since, that of intermediary between the cultures of the Near East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

In 1949 and 1951 Coon also excavated what he called “Mesolithic” caves (the term has now been replaced by “Epipaleolithic”) in the cliffs on the southeastern Caspian shore near Sārī: the Belt Cave (Ġār-e kamarband) and Hotu Cave (Coon, 1952; idem, 1957). The caves became habitable around 9800 b.c.e., as the Caspian Sea retreated about 10 km toward the present shoreline. A variety of local animals were eaten, including seals, sheep, goats, gazelles, voles, and birds. The Belt Cave produced bone tools, hand stones and querns, microliths, and heavier blades and flakes. Hotu Cave contained amorphous flakes and pebble tools, but no microliths. This difference in the remains from adjacent sites remains unexplained. The discovery of partial skeletal remains of six people is the only known evidence for the human Epipaleolithic population of the territory that is now Persia. These individuals are described as fully modern, tall, with well-formed muscles; they probably lived about forty years. The bodies, sprinkled with red ocher, represent the earliest deliberate burials known in the region. These burials were both primary and secondary in nature and date to between 7000 and 6500 b.c.e. Coon thought in 1957 that these remains reflected a form of incipient Neolithic culture, as simple pottery, polished stone, and some domesticated goats and sheep were found in the same levels, but it is now clear that this material overlaps the Neolithic of the western Zagros at Ganj Dareh (Ganj Darra) and Sarāb and is also chronologically parallel to the Dzheġtun (Jeytūn) culture in former Soviet Turkmenistan and Mehrgarh in Pakistani Baluchistan (Ehrich).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For Coon’s biography, see *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* I. 1953-59, New York, 1960, pp. 108-09.



- E. D. Chapple and C. S. Coon, *Principles of Anthropology*, New York, 1942.
- C. S. Coon, *Tribes of the Rif*, Cambridge, Mass., 1931.
- Idem, *A Reader in General Anthropology*, New York, 1948.
- Idem, *Caravan*, New York, 1951a. Idem, *Cave Explorations in Iran 1949*, Philadelphia, 1951b.
- Idem, "Excavations in Hotu Cave Iran, 1951.
- A Preliminary Report (with Sections on the Artifacts by L. B. Dupree and the Human Skeletal Remains by L. J. Angel)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 96, 1952, pp. 231-69.
- Idem, *The Story of Man*, New York, 1954.
- Idem, *The Seven Caves*, New York, 1957.
- Idem, *The Origin of Races*, New York, 1962.
- Idem, *The Living Races of Man*, New York, 1965.
- Idem, *The Hunting Peoples*, Boston, 1971.
- Idem, *Adventures and Discoveries*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981.
- R. W. Ehrich, ed., *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology*, 2nd ed., Chicago, in press. P. E. Smith, *Palaeolithic Archaeology in Iran*, Philadelphia, 1986.