

Settlement Dynamics

of the Middle Paleolithic
and Middle Stone Age

Volume III

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Edited by
Nicholas J. Conard
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FOREWORD

This volume, despite being referred to as Settlement Dynamics III, actually presents the research reported at the fourth meeting of Commission 27 of the UISPP on Settlement Dynamics of the Middle Paleolithic and Middle Stone Age. This meeting took place as part of the 15th UISPP Congress in Lisbon in September 2006. The previous meetings of the commission, which all led to substantial publications, took place in Forlì in 1996, in Tübingen in 1999 and in Liège in 2001. Currently the editors are preparing for the fifth meeting of the commission to be held in Les Eyzies in June 2010.

This is a fitting place to review the goals of the commission and to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of its work. First we can consider whether or not it is appropriate to address such a general topic. From our point of view, research profits from a broad approach, which is why this series has always included contributions from diverse regions in Africa and Eurasia. The 22 papers included in this volume and the many papers from previous volumes in the series fall in the period of human evolution between roughly 300,000 and 30,000 years ago.

This relatively late phase of human evolution reflects the time during which anatomically modern humans (AMH) evolved in Africa, and several other hominins evolved in Eurasia. During this time, the range of Neanderthals expanded and contracted over much of western Eurasia. The newest data from paleogenetics indicate that another form of hominin evolved in parts of central and eastern Eurasia. To this complex picture we add *Homo floresiensis*, who despite its archaic morphology survived into the Late Quaternary of Sahul and overlapped chronologically with the arrival of modern humans. The MSA and Middle Paleolithic represent the periods during which modern humans evolved and repeatedly tested the geographic limits of their range inside and outside Africa. Similarly, a complex picture of population dynamics among archaic hominins is presently emerging in Eurasia.

The complex cultural patterning visible in the most recent studies shows that the allegedly simple dichotomy between archaic and modern humans is not reflected in the archaeological record. The term Middle Stone Age is used to refer to the archaeological record of sub-Saharan Africa, while this part of the record in North Africa, depending on the researchers in question, is defined to belong to either the MSA or the Middle Paleolithic. In southwestern Asia and Europe, the term Middle Paleolithic is used by most researchers. Other regions such as Arabia, and southern and eastern Asia are still so poorly understood, that the term Middle Paleolithic is often used as a general way to classify the finds from the late Middle Pleistocene and most of the Late Pleistocene. The archaeological assemblages from across the Old World are diverse and generally relatively heterogeneous, at least in the relatively few regions from which reliable data are available.

The somewhat ambitious goal of UISPP Commission 27 is to provide researchers with a forum to examine how hominins across the Old World organized their lives, especially in terms of the interconnected areas of subsistence, technology, mobility, economics, and social organization. Since its inception in 1995 the commission has defined settlement dynamics in contrast to traditional cultural stratigraphy. Rather than looking mainly at the sequence of cultural forms as reflected in changing patterns of artifact types, the commission has emphasized the settlement dynamics of Paleolithic populations. From the start, the commission viewed the various regions under study in their own right and has acknowledged the vast diversity of the archaeological record. Rather than looking for normative answers to the question of how

AMH, Neanderthals or other archaic hominins lived, the commission has assumed and often demonstrated that hominins organized their system of settlement and related forms of behavior in contextually specific ways that reflect adaptations to the conditions at hand. Thus, we assume that there are relatively few universally meaningful answers to general questions about how early AMH or late archaic hominins lived. Furthermore, such universals need to be demonstrated rather than asserted.

While some members of the scientific community assume the validity of binary concepts of modern and archaic adaptations, the work in Commission 27 seeks to establish empirically reliable case studies that can help to form the basis for developing more sophisticated approaches for improving our understanding of long-term cultural evolution. Toward this goal, the commission welcomes studies at any scale, including detailed intra-site, regional, and super-regional analyses. Depending on the setting in question, researchers are encouraged to focus on lithic, faunal, botanical, geological, geographic and demographic data to reconstruct how hominins of the MSA and Middle Paleolithic organized their activities and lifeways.

We hope with this book to have made a useful and lasting contribution to the goal of establishing a reliable basis for the discussion of the patterns of settlement and land use across much of the Old World. In reading the contributions to this volume multiple theoretical approaches emerge and both specific and more general patterns of settlement dynamics become visible. We hope these contributions will advance the research on this key period of human evolution and cultural development.

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