

NEANDERTHAL PEOPLE AT THE GATES OF EUROPE

Takeru Akazawa, Sultan Muhesen, Hajime Ishida, and Osamu Kondo

In 1997, a joint Syria-Japan project discovered the skull of a Neanderthal child in the Dederiyeh Cave in northern Syria. Although the skeletons of other several Neanderthals had previously discovered in the cave, this is the first discovery made in Syria that enables paleoanthropologists to reconstruct the face of a Neanderthal child. Dederiyeh Cave is about 400 km N of Damascus and 60 km NW of Aleppo, Syria. The cave at an elevation of 450 m above sea level, lies on the left bank of Wadi Dederiyeh which crosses the western slope of Jabal Samaan, the east boundary of Afrin Valley in the northern extremity of the Dead Sea Rift. Excavation has been under way in the cave since 1989; in 1993, the mostly complete skeleton of a two-year-old child was discovered. Other discoveries include thousands of Middle Paleolithic flints and the bones of fossilized remains of animals such as Ovis/Capra, Gazella, Equus, Sus, Rhinoceros, as well as petrified Celtis (hackberries). Many fire rings measuring 30-40 cm in diameter were also found. The Dederiyeh Cave has thus produced new data on the stratigraphic association between Neanderthals and the Middle Paleolithic industry in the Levant, and on the distribution of the stratigraphic association between Neanderthals and the Middle Paleolithic in the northern extremity of the Dead Sea Rift.