

THE NEANDERTHAL-UPPER PALEOLITHIC TRANSITION SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MLADEČ

by

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Questions concerning the relationship between Neanderthal and Upper Paleolithic populations generally center on the differences between European Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnon series. Viewed from this perspective, there seem to be great differences between these two hominid groups and little evidence for continuity. However, chronologically earlier human remains from Mladeč provide a different viewpoint. This material, discovered in Moravia between 1881-1922, is attributed to the earliest Aurignacian and consists of four main crania, maxillary and mandibular pieces, isolated teeth, and postcranial elements. This material shows a mosaic of features that together can be considered transitional between Mousterian and later Aurignacian samples, especially with respect to cranial shape and size, chin development, browridge form, mastoid morphology, tooth size and certain postcranial features. In many respects, the human remains from Mladeč provide good evidence for the continuity between the Mousterian and the earliest phase of the Upper Paleolithic. Furthermore, there is a great deal of variation between and among the sexes at Mladeč, indicating that attempts to attribute single morphological types as characterizing Upper Paleolithic populations are without basis. Review of the metric and morphological characteristics of the Mladeč human material, along with other Central European specimens, indicates that the gap between Mousterian and Upper Paleolithic populations is not as large as some predict, at least not in this region of Europe.

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