

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have seen a resurgence of interest in the human cultural dynamics that led to the establishment of humans occupying all but the most extreme environments of the Old World during the Middle Paleolithic and then in the variety of changes in human social, cultural and adaptive behavior that occurred with the emergence of the Upper Paleolithic. Much of the research and discussion (passionate and calm) regarding these periods of human cultural evolution has been concerned with the establishment of "behavioral modernity." At approximately the same time in geological history, the Old World saw the emergence, dispersal and eventual dominance of "anatomically modern" humans, people whose biology closely approximates those of recent (Holocene) human populations.

This discussion has been played out extensively in Africa and extreme south west Asia, geographical regions in which there is early, Middle Paleolithic (*sensu lato*, including the Middle Stone Age of sub-Saharan Africa), evidence of early modern humans and rare and scattered archeological evidence for "behavioral modernity." It has refocused attention on the Middle Paleolithic of western Eurasia, and its primary denizens the Neanderthals, to assess both whether they shared the same "advanced" behavioral characteristics as their more southerly contemporaries and what form of background they might provide for the eventual establishment of modern human biology and Upper Paleolithic behavioral patterns within that region. As a result, we know much more about the biology and behavior of these Middle Paleolithic humans than we did a few decades ago. Unfortunately, too much of the emphasis has been on establishing or refuting the "modernity" (behaviorally and anatomically) of those Middle Paleolithic "modern humans" in southwest Asia and Africa and on rejecting or documenting elements of "modernity" for the much-maligned Neanderthals.

This concern with the emergence and establishment of modern humanity, biologically and behaviorally, has also brought renewed attention to the earliest modern humans within the broader expanses of Eurasia. Western Eurasia has an abundance of associated human remains, many from elaborate "red ochre" burials, for the Mid Upper Paleolithic, and there are scattered remains from the same time period (generally 30,000 to 20,000 ¹⁴C BP) in eastern Eurasia and a few portions of Africa.

However, "anatomically modern" human remains from the preceding period, generally subsumed within the Aurignacian in western Eurasia, are scarce, incomplete and, ironically, poorly documented until recently. There is, however, an abundance of archeological data and behavioral inferences for the generally associated Aurignacian (*sensu lato*) technocomplex, and ongoing research continues to refine both its behavioral and chronological parameters.

Even though both Middle and earlier Upper Paleolithic assemblages have been known from southeastern Europe for a long time, they have generally played a minor role in broader interpretations of Late Pleistocene human biocultural dynamics. There are a few exceptions, such as the Bulgarian site of Bacho Kiro that spans the Middle-to-Upper Paleolithic time period, but the other sites have received only minor pan-Old World attention. This has resulted in part from the absence of "spectacular" finds, such as early art or elaborate burials. It has been due more generally to the small sizes of many of the archeological assemblages, assemblages that derive from excavations in caves and rockshelters that served principally as carnivore dens and/or sustained significant post-depositional disturbance. At the same time, Pleistocene human remains have been rare, fragmentary (as in the Bacho Kiro sample) or poorly dated (as in the Cioclovina and Muierii remains).

This situation is steadily being remedied within one of the key countries of the region, Romania. Not only does Romania form the northern border of one of the principal geographic corridors through southeastern Europe, the Danube basin, but it contains the majority of the Carpathian Mountains, a geologically complex arc of mountains that contains an abundance of caves and a diversity of ecozones. This change is emerging from a series of new and ongoing excavations in Late Pleistocene sites [e.g., Peştera cu Oase, Peştera Cioclovina Uscată, Mitoc-Malu Galben, Peştera Gura Cheii, Mitoc-Valea Izvorului, Peştera Cioarei, Peştera Coacăzei, Poiana Cireşului, Zăbrani (Otte *et al.* 2007; Cârциumaru *et al.* 2006, 2008, 2009; Soficaru *et al.* 2007; Zilhão *et al.* 2007; Tuffreau *et al.* 2007, 2009a)], reassessments of the technological complexes for the Middle and earlier Upper Paleolithic (Dobrescu 2008; Popescu 2009; Cârциumaru and Țuțuianu-Cârциumaru 2009; Doboş 2010), and espe-

cially reassessments of the chronology of both the Paleolithic sites and the potentially Pleistocene human remains (e.g., Soficaru *et al.* 2006, 2007; Damblon & Haesaerts 2007; Tuffreau *et al.* 2009a; Balescu *et al.* n.d.). It is this context that brings us to one of the more important sites in Romanian, and southeast European, Paleolithic archeology and human paleontology, the Peștera Muierii, Baia de Fier, Gorj County, Oltenia.

In addition to these Pleistocene concerns, there has also been a growing concern with the bioarcheology and Holocene human paleobiology in the region. As such, the interest has begun to shift away from concerns with population movements in the region through the middle Holocene to assessments of the biology and behavior of the populations in their archeological contexts.

The Peștera Muierii

It is in this general context that we present here a reanalysis of the Paleolithic and Holocene archeological remains, the Pleistocene human fossils and a Bronze Age human skeleton from the Peștera Muierii (also known as the Peștera Muierilor). As an extensive cave system, along the northern edges of the Danube Basin where ecozones currently meet and would have during the Late Pleistocene and earlier Holocene, not far from the Iron Gates, the Peștera Muierii should have been a prime location for humans and other animals.

The site has been known archeologically since the end of the nineteenth century, and its archeological deposits were extensively excavated in the middle of the twentieth century (see Chapter 3). There was a series of brief reports on the archeology and the human remains in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, after that initial period of attention, the results of the excavation largely disappeared from view. Summaries or aspects appeared in Romanian synthetic treatments (e.g., Dumitrescu *et al.* 1983; Chirica *et al.* 1996; Cârciumar 1999; Păunescu 2000), but there was little interest in the, by then scattered, archeological material and poorly dated human remains. The situation changed in 2001 with the direct radiocarbon dating of the anatomically modern human remains from the Galeria Musteriană to the Early Upper

Paleolithic (Olariu *et al.*, 2001; Păunescu 2001). This reassessment led to renewed interest in the human remains from the site (Soficaru *et al.* 2006; Trinkaus 2007, 2008a), more extensive dating of the remains (Soficaru *et al.* 2006; Doboș *et al.* 2009), stable isotope analysis of the human and cave bear remains (Richards *et al.* 2008a; Doboș *et al.* 2009; Richards & Trinkaus 2009; Trinkaus *et al.* 2009), and reassessments of the Middle Paleolithic artifactual assemblage (Popescu 2009; Doboș 2010).

Even though the original articles from the 1950s and 1960s, the more recent summaries in synthetic works, and our recent publications on various aspects of the site and its remains have brought the Peștera Muierii to the attention of the field in general, the site and its contents remain poorly known. This small monograph is intended to remedy that situation. It summarizes the geological nature of the site and current chronological assessments of its deposits (Chapter 2), reviews the history of work on the site and its excavated material (Chapter 3), summarizes the available vertebrate paleontological information (Chapter 4), furnishes a reanalysis of the Middle Paleolithic and earlier Upper Paleolithic artifactual collections (Chapter 5), presents the Holocene archeological remains (Chapter 6), provides a detailed description of the Pleistocene human remains (Chapter 7), and presents the partial human skeleton from the Bronze Age levels of the Galeria Principală (Chapter 8).

Over the years since the excavations of the 1950s, the archeological and paleontological remains from the Peștera Muierii have become scattered in various institutions in Romania, and number of pieces have become lost. However, it is possible to put together both the previously published data and new assessments of the available material into a synthesis of information on the Peștera Muierii. It is hoped that this effort, and the data contained within it, will help to integrate the Peștera Muierii and its contents into the Late Pleistocene and Holocene records of southeastern Europe. It may not resolve key issues regarding the emergence of modern human biology and "behavioral modernity," nor sort out the population paleobiology of the Romanian Bronze Age. But it should contribute substantially to our perceptions of these processes along the "Danube Corridor."