

## Preface

Today, humans are the most cosmopolitan of all primates, and one of the most widespread of all living mammals. Our lineage has not always been so geographically widespread. For over two-thirds of our evolutionary history, from our divergence from chimpanzees more than 6 million years ago, until as recently as 2 million years ago, hominins were an endemic African group. Sometime near the beginning of the Pleistocene, just under 2 million years ago, this all changed, and archeological and paleontological evidence of early hominins appears in many parts of Eurasia. The papers in this volume address the many facets of the first hominin range expansion from Africa into Eurasia.

These include not just the obvious issues of when hominins first appear in Eurasia and the type of evidence indicating their presence, but a whole series of broader questions about the nature of this initial hominin intercontinental dispersal. Why did hominins first leave Africa in the Early Pleistocene and no earlier? What do we know about the adaptations of the hominins that dispersed – their diet, locomotor abilities, cultural abilities? Was there a single dispersal event or several? Did this initial dispersal lead to successful colonization of Eurasia, or were they just temporary excursions? Was the hominin dispersal part of a broader faunal expansion of African mammals northward, or is there something unique about our lineage? What route or routes did dispersing populations take? Why do we have evidence of Early Pleistocene hominins in western and eastern Asia, but nothing in between?

In order to address these and many other issues regarding the initial dispersal of hominins out of Africa, we organized the Second Stony Brook Human Evolution Symposium and Workshop in 2005. An international group of scholars assembled in Stony Brook for 5 days of presentations and discussions to explore our current understanding of this aspect of human evolution and to identify priorities for future research. This volume is the result of that meeting. Since the mid-1980s, the lower boundary of the Pleistocene Epoch (i.e., the beginning of the Quaternary Period) has been regarded as corresponding with the base of the Calabrian stratotype, at 1.81 Ma. Recently, however, the International Union of Geological Sciences has recognized the base of the Gelasian stratotype, which corresponds to the Matuyama (C2r) chronozone, or the Gauss-Matuyama boundary, as defining the Pliocene-Pleistocene boundary at 2.588 Ma. Because many of the papers were submitted before that change, in this volume, the older convention has been followed with the base of the Pleistocene at 1.8 Ma.

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Out of Africa I

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