

Preface

The period between 71 and 25 ka (Marine Isotope Stages [MIS] 4 and 3) was a critical one in the evolution of our species. This time span witnessed the spread of anatomically modern humans across the Old World, the disappearance of the Neanderthals, the transition from Middle Stone Age (MSA)/Middle Paleolithic (MP) tool traditions to Later Stone Age (LSA)/Upper Paleolithic (UP) technologies, an explosion of evidence for material culture with symbolic significance, and significant global population growth. Climatically speaking, the phase preserves the transition from a glacial period to an interstadial, with records indicating the onset of remarkably high variability in climate during MIS 3. The recent publication of genetic data which indicate that not only were Neanderthals and early modern humans capable of interbreeding, but that Neanderthals did make a genetic contribution to our species, has made it clear that gaining a deeper insight into potential behavioral differences between these populations—particularly in terms of their adaptive strategies/capabilities—will be of key importance in understanding not only the rapid spread and success of early modern humans, but also the ultimate demise of the Neanderthals. The zooarchaeological record provides unique insight into these issues, serving as a valuable source of information on human responses to changes in both climate and demography, and on the ways which variation in technology may have impacted hunting and processing strategies. This volume, which is based on a session that was held at the 11th International Conference of the International Council of Archaeozoology (ICAZ) in Paris in August 2010, brings together a diverse group of scholars who have worked with faunal assemblages dating to MIS 4 and/or 3 from Eurasia and Africa, in order to more fully explore the range and nature of variability in human hunting behavior during this period, and to explore the ways that the zooarchaeological record can contribute to our broader understanding of modern human origins.

We would like to thank the many people who made this volume possible; first, the organizing committee of the 11th International ICAZ Conference, Drs. Jean-Denis Vigne, Christine Lefèvre, and Marylène Patou-Mathis, who helped make the Paris meetings a tremendous success. Thanks also to all the participants in our session—both oral and poster presentations were interesting, informative, and stimulating. Special thanks go to those who prepared their presentations for publication in this volume—their hard work (and patience) is much appreciated. We also owe a debt of gratitude to all those who responded to our requests for reviews—especially to those individuals who graciously agreed to review more than one chapter. Finally, thanks to Judith Terpos and the team at Springer, as well as to Eric Delson and Eric J. Sargis, the Editors of the Vertebrate Paleobiology and Paleoanthropology Series, for their support throughout the publication process.

Zooarchaeology and Modern Human Origins

Human Hunting Behavior during the Later Pleistocene

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2013, XI, 275 p. 82 illus., 50 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-007-6765-2