

## Where do we come from, and how?

**Matthew H. Nitecki & Doris V. Nitecki (eds). 1994. *Origins of anatomically modern humans*. 341 pp, 20 text-figs, 17 tables. Plenum Press, New York.**

This volume of the 'Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology' stems from the Spring Systematics Symposium held in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago in May, 1991, which gathered most of the leading authorities in palaeoanthropology, presenting their views on current evidence, attempting to fit them into some general synthesis (though often differing widely from author to author). Despite its composite nature, the volume forms a consistent whole, thanks to the arrangement of contributions (by 19 authors) and editors' introductions to each section of the book (and the introductory chapter by R.G. Klein) helping to link them together.

Among the main topics discussed is the interpretation of Middle and Upper Paleolithic fossil evidence, especially in the Mediterranean region. The old question of biological and cultural relationships between the Neanderthals and anatomically modern humans still seems to be far from resolved. The elucidation of the nature of the Middle to Late Paleolithic transition in Western Europe, in the Levant and elsewhere requires further studies, but many interesting insights can be deduced from what is already at hand. New dating techniques (thermoluminescence and electron spin resonance, filling the gap between applicability of radiocarbon and uranium methods) and progress in radiocarbon methods allows us to clarify the chronology of the transition. New sites and more complex analyses of the old ones reveal new data on tool making and use, as well as of the living habits of Late Pleistocene hominids. Together with refined anatomical information, they allow for a new, more complete image of the Neanderthals' unique adaptations and survival strategy in harsh, periglacial conditions, as well as possible reasons of their rather stagnant culture and subsequent disappearance (contributions by A.J. Jelinek, C. Farizy, O. Soffer).

The volume brings also presentations of up-to-date versions of both main theories explaining our emergence: the 'Out of Africa' (including 'mitochondrial Eve') theory (R.L. Cann *et al.*), as well as a short synopsis of its historical development (C.B. Stringer), and the multiregional human evolution theory (M.H. Wolpoff *et al.*). Theoretical models of speciation and hybridization of human populations within the framework of the latter model are confronted with the fossil record (T. Simmons, F.H. Smith).

The concluding chapter by F.C. Howell offers a review of important skeletal fossil finds of *Homo*, including a number from less known Asian sites, provided with a detailed chronostratigraphic framework, and taxonomic interpretation based on listed anatomical features of particular fossils. This rich factual base is then used as a starting point to delineate apparent conclusions as well as pointing to still unresolved questions, needing further research.

The volume is a worthy review of the current state of the main schools of palaeoanthropological thought of the mid-1990s, a useful guide through the plethora of human evolutionary models proposed in the last few decades, and a valuable bibliographical source of original works. The book shows clearly, how much is still to be learned about our past, before a wide consensus would be imaginable. It can be thus recommended to all those palaeontologists, evolutionary biologists, and other people with some theoretical background in these disciplines, who share at least a theoretical interest in the puzzle of the origin of our own species.