

JOÃO ZILHÃO, FRANCESCO D'ERRICO, eds.

# The Chronology of the Aurignacian and of the Transitional Technocomplexes

Dating, Stratigraphies, Cultural Implications

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# Preface

Nobody can deny it. In spite of the countless conferences, the dozens of books and the myriads of research and synthesis papers published since the discovery of the Saint-Césaire skeleton, a comprehensive picture of the emergence of the Upper Paleolithic in Europe and of the replacement of Neandertals by anatomically modern humans (“the Transition”) is still beyond our grasp. But pieces of that puzzle are falling into place, and this is happening in conjunction with a remarkable change of attitude by many researchers.

The production of primary data, conducted with the often-frustrated hope that new discoveries and more consistent records will in a distant future provide answers to today’s ill-defined questions, is gradually giving way to the idea that gaining a better insight into this period requires the elaboration of robust hypotheses and their testing against the archaeological record. We are also learning that such testing would be of little use without a previous thorough critical analysis of the evidence from the main sites, including discussions of their taphonomy, surviving material culture, and dating.

It is also becoming clear that evaluating the empirical consistency of the different scenarios proposed for the transition requires looking beyond the frontiers of national research traditions. Even when bearing well identifiable features, a piece of a puzzle is of no help in getting the picture if we do not see where it may fit in. An additional reason for not losing this panoramic perspective is that the Neandertal *affaire* as a whole may be seen as a key piece of a bigger puzzle in which Africa and Asia are also included. The characterization of the cultural trajectories of human populations living in these vast territories during the Upper Pleistocene must be at the root of any model for the emergence of symbolism, language and the other “modern” traits that make our societies different, in many respects, from those of our closest living relatives and certainly of a number of our ancestors.

It is with these priorities in mind that, over the last decade, the editors of this book have proposed a reappraisal of the nature and timing of the biological and cultural interactions that took place in Europe between Neandertals and anatomically modern humans, and discussed the general implications of their results for the emergence of cultural modernity. It is in this framework that we envisioned the need to bring together colleagues working on this topic for a broad and open debate on this controversial issue, and to transform such an event into a widely available publication. The XIVth Congress of the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences, held in Liège in September 2001, provided the opportunity for such a meeting. The two-day symposium that we organized within the framework of this congress brought together 66 leading international scholars, who presented 31 papers, and a very large and interested audience, which virtually transformed this meeting into a conference within a conference. The heated though friendly debates that took place in the symposium room, not to mention the many hours spent in discussing the same topics at night while enjoying excellent Belgian beers, greatly contributed to a clarification of the opinions expressed by the attending scientists.

To facilitate the diffusion of the proceedings, give homogeneity to the planned book, and make available to the widest audience the results presented, contributors were asked

at Liège to submit their papers for publication in English. We received twenty-two manuscripts between January 2002 and March 2003. Two manuscripts submitted in French were not included in this book and one, submitted in English, was at some stage withdrawn. Authors were given the opportunity to revise their contributions after editing, and papers eventually went to press in June 2003.

Considering the nature of the meeting and the rules imposed by the IUPPS conference organizers, no further selection process was undertaken. Although English texts and figures were edited when necessary to improve comprehension, the editors took great care to avoid changing the contents of the manuscripts, and they did not ask authors to do so in response to their own or external reviewers' remarks. It is for this reason that the editors felt it useful and somewhat necessary to summarize their own views of the more relevant contributions in a joint paper at the end of the book. We hope this paper will bring to the printed page that climate of constructive debate which characterized the symposium, and that the different contributors and colleagues in the field as a whole will find it a useful addition that helps turn this book into an updated synthesis of current knowledge on "the Transition".

The editors owe a debt of thanks to Frédéric Plassard for his help in editing the papers' lists of references, and to Paul Bahn for his final correction of the English texts. Their work and a meeting of the editors in Talence in December 2002 were funded by a project led by Francesco d'Errico within the framework of the Eurocore research program on the Origin of Man, Language and Languages supported in 1999 by the French CNRS and the following years by the European Science Foundation. The interest of this program in the Middle-Upper Paleolithic transition, attested by the presence at the Liège symposium of its coordinator in the French CNRS, Jean-Marie Hombert, is warmly acknowledged.

Francesco d'Errico  
João Zilhão  
May 31, 2003

