

# Preface

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The idea for having a workshop dedicated to the definition of the Aurignacian emerged when we felt that there were major disagreements among colleagues in recognizing what the “real” Aurignacian is. While not ignoring the disputes concerning the chronology of this “prehistoric culture”, and the question of “who made these tools”, we felt that the basic criteria for defining an assemblage as “Aurignacian” were not as clear as one would expect after a century of research. An unfortunate development is that the term “Aurignacian”, originally suggested by Breuil in 1912, is today associated with the genetically supported hypothesis of the colonization of Europe by modern humans, or Cro-Magnons. The impact of this equation is that research became focused on origins issues, with some viewing the Aurignacian as originating in remote areas, far away from Europe, such as central or western Asia, while alternative interpretations suggest seeing it as the culmination of local, European cultural processes.

During the last decade, increasing numbers of scholars have accepted the notion that the earliest Upper Paleolithic assemblages in Eurasia were found in the Levant, where the ensuing sequence of later industries provides the evidence for continuous occupations of this region. The Initial Upper Paleolithic industries in the Levant are generally characterized by blade production bearing residual morphological attributes of the former Middle Paleolithic, such as faceted striking platforms. However, the main classes of retouched pieces are those that led early twentieth century archaeologists to define the onset of the Upper Paleolithic by stressing the presence of endscrapers and burins. Particular tool types of this region include “chamfered” (à chanfrein) blades and flakes in the northern Levant, and Emireh points mainly in the southern Levant. Early blade industries appear also in eastern Europe (e.g., Bachokirian, Bohunician), and are interpreted by some scholars as marking the expansion of modern humans through the “Danube Corridor”. Others see them as autochthonous developments out of local, preceding Middle Paleolithic traditions, akin to the industries with backed pieces and backed points of southern and western Europe (e.g., Uluzzian and Châtelperronian). The latter stratigraphically precede the emergence of the classical Aurignacian, and at least one of them, the Châtelperronian, has been found in association with Neandertal remains.

Historically, “classical” Aurignacian assemblages were recognized as those consisting of bone and antler tools, pendants made from animal teeth and more, together with the proliferation of blades and bladelets, as well as nosed and carinated scrapers, prismatic and some carinated cores. While, in most cases, sites in western, central and even eastern Europe produced the full package of the Aurignacian, with a certain degree of variability mostly among the bone and antler objects, the situation in western Asia and central Asia is different. Scholars searching for the origins of the Aurignacian have picked a limited set of cultural characteristics such as blade and bladelet production, and carinated cores, as the common cultural markers. Classifying carinated cores as scrapers results in increasing confusion; such cores appear in different localities at different times and are just a technique for obtaining bladelets that is not unique to the Aurignacian. Unfortunately, by reducing the

“Aurignacian” package to only a few elements meant that numerous Upper Paleolithic industries across Eurasia could be seen as “Aurignacian”. Hence, the term has tended to lose its culturally, territorially useful definition.

At this juncture, we felt that the gathering of colleagues who study the “Aurignacian” cultural phenomenon should be an essential step for clarification. We asked everyone who intended to come to bring some lithic collections so we could achieve a better understanding of the used terminology and learn how and why certain collections were defined as “Aurignacian”. We did not expect a full agreement given the different traditions in classification between schools of archaeology, although most participants were either trained in France or knew well the French literature on this subject. The discussions with the artifacts in hand were useful, as was the substantial amount of time allocated to presentations and discussions.

The success of the meeting was to a large extent made possible by the comfortable and well-equipped facilities at the Centro Cultural de Belém, in Lisbon, where we all gathered in June 25-30, 2002; we thank staff and management for their courteous and efficient assistance. We would also like to thank all those who participated in the meeting, as well as those who submitted papers. Unfortunately, for various reasons, it took us longer than expected to complete this volume. The papers collected here are arranged according to conceptual and geographical criteria, first those that deal with general issues of definition, then those that deal with regional studies, from west to east; within each group, an alphabetical order was followed.

We are grateful to Wren Fournier (Peabody Museum, Harvard University), who efficiently and diligently assisted us in organizing the meeting and the collection of the different contributions. Last but not the least, we thank the Instituto Português de Arqueologia for logistical and other support to the organization of the meeting as well as for the publication of its proceedings in the “Trabalhos de Arqueologia” series, and the American School of Prehistoric Research (Peabody Museum, Harvard University), who sponsored the symposium and the publication of this volume.