

Preface

New finds of human remains, datings, statistical methods and new discoveries in population genetics, all this and a complex multidisciplinary approach brought new ideas into palaeoanthropology. One of the most dramatic periods is the *Homo erectus* time, which goes now 1,500,000 years back, that is far more than we only few years ago expected.

In some regions of the world the latest finds are as late as 100,000—50,000 years B.P. We can therefore say that *Homo erectus* existed nearly for one-and-a-half million years which means that he was a very successful link in human evolution, well adapted to different conditions of different parts of the Old World. He was fully erect with bipedal locomotion similar as we have, his hand was as ours, his cranial capacity, although lower than ours was overlapping in maximum values with minimum values of modern man. He was successful hunter of big game and his hunting when needed was certainly well organized. There was distinct sexual dimorphism and the division of activities between sexes. As his tool assemblages demonstrate there was a fairly complex cultural tradition and as the discovered living sites and dwelling places show there was some social organisation. He discovered fire and he constructed first advanced dwellings. He was a real Man. The European finds raised the question of the limits between *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens* where it is and if it is on the species level. They raised the need to correlate chronologically the finds from diverse parts of the world. New knowledge of climatic and environmental conditions has brought new insight in his mode of life. If only few years ago prevailed the opinion that he represents a later extinct evolutionary side-branch now more and more prevails the idea that he was the direct forerunner of modern man. New finds appear in Africa, Europe, Indonesia and elsewhere nearly every year.

This modest volume tries to contribute to our knowledge of this fascinating period of human origin. It brings some new discoveries, broadens e.g. the territory of Middle Pleistocene hominids in Europe and especially in Central Europe, bringing some new ideas and facts about the physical as well as cultural evolution of this important hominid in Africa and Asia.

Let us hope that it will encourage further international cooperation in our science endeavouring to discover and understand our common origin,

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