

# Bedrock of Human Prehistory in Pakistan

The Early Palaeolithic in Northern Punjab

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## FOREWORD

This volume, which opens a new series of monographs on the archaeology of the Indian Subcontinent, is composed of four main sections: the introduction, which concerns the problem of hominization in the Old World; the second, which is an accurate description of the research carried out in the Potohar Plateau, Palaeolithic sites; the third, dealing with the problem of the presence/absence of human Palaeontological remains in Pakistan; and the fourth, a series of Appendixes regarding the technological and scientific approaches to the study of the Palaeolithic period as a whole.

The title of the monograph, *Bedrock of Human Prehistory in Pakistan*, clearly brings out the basic importance of this work within the framework of the Archaeological studies of the country, while its subtitle categorically indicates the specific argument it concerns, the Early Palaeolithic in a well-defined region of the Punjab.

A general introduction, although punctilious and updated, describes briefly the progressive stages of the himinization process, starting from Africa, where the first bipedal hominids and the fossil remains of the earliest tool producing individuals were discovered. Then the author gives the reader a precise geomorphologic and stratigraphic outline of the Potohar Plateau, in northern Punjab. Here, Early Palaeolithic, open-air sites of major importance for the understanding of the passage of the first human beings in the Indian Subcontinent were discovered and excavated during the 1980s by a joint expedition composed of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan, and the Cambridge University, British Mission. Although many Palaeolithic sites had already been discovered in this territory since 1863 thanks to the pioneering work of British Archaeologists, it is only in 1930s that the first detailed interpretation of the complex stratigraphic sequences that characterize the Potohar Plateau, which yielded Palaeolithic man-made tools and associated faunal remains, were finally published. In this volume, the author critically discusses the interpretation and the chronology of these sequences as they were provided by different authors since the discoveries of the first investigators.

The typological list employed in the description of the Potohar chipped stone assemblages of the Elden Johnson Collection utilizes a terminology which accurately defines the various tools. Further details of their characteristics are given in a series of progressive tables. Of basic importance is the summary description of a number of Early Palaeolithic Soan Culture sites discovered in the region and of the Pabbi Hills industries where 700 artefacts were collected during fieldwork, and excavations carried out at selective fossil sites between 1986 and 1990.

The following Chapter, on the suspected presence of hominid fossil remains in the region, provides extremely interesting information that had never been revealed before, such as the supposed discovery of a Neanderthal skull in the mountains of the Kirthar Range. Whenever confirmed, this discovery would change the entire picture of the spread of individuals of this species south of the Himalayan chain, opening new perspectives regarding the problem of the dispersal of these hominids towards the east, and of their characteristic Mousterian lithic assemblages.

Of particular importance are also the appendixes that close the volume. They regard A) the most important radiometric methods employed for dating the Palaeolithic

assemblages, B) the typology of the chipped stone assemblages of the Early and Middle Palaeolithic Cultures in their chronological and typological sequence, C) the out-of-Africa theory and the dispersal of human beings in the Asian Continent, and D) the technology of the material culture assemblages of the Upper Palaeolithic, mainly based on the French chronotypological sequence. These Appendixes, of clear didactic character, represent a basic, fundamental approach to the study of the Palaeolithic. They are considered to be very useful to students and amateur archaeologists.

This volume represents a further step in the study of the Palaeolithic of Pakistan and the Indian Subcontinent, a discipline whose difficulties, particularly in the author's country, also due to the absence of 'laboratory facilities for geochronology' are clearly remarked in his Preface.

Ca' Foscari University,  
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Paolo Biagi