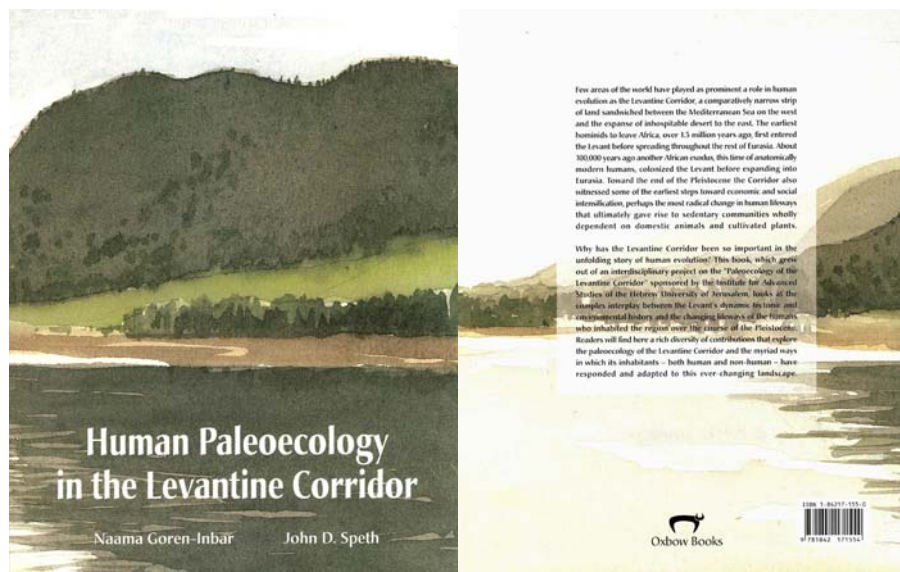


Goren–Inbar, N. & J.D. Speth. Eds. 2004. **Human paleoecology in the Levantine Corridor.** – Oxford, Oxbow Books

Book review by J. de Vos



The Levantine Corridor is the strip of land between Africa and Eurasia, bounded by the deserts on the east and the Mediterranean on the west. The importance of this strip is that there can be an exchange of animals from Africa to Europe and vice versa. In this strip there are Palaeolithic, Epipalaeolithic, and Neolithic sites, ranging in age from 1.4 Ma until about 12 Ka. Most of what is happening in this period is described in isolated papers, but a comprehensive overview did not exist. The book 'Human paleoecology in the Levantine Corridor', intends to fill this gap. It is composed of 14 chapters (articles), based on lectures given during an international conference held at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in July 2002. The chapters are written by well known scientists in their field. The book comprises the following topics: 'The Levantine waterway' (chapter 1), 'Quaternary lake margins' (chapter 2), 'Mammals' (chapter 3), 'Elephants' (chapter 4), 'Freshwater turtle' (chapter 5), 'Taphonomic studies of early hominid subsistence' (chapter 6), 'Bands and other corporate hominid groups in Acheulian Culture' (chapter 7), 'Culture and genes in the evolution of human language' (chapter 8), 'Climate variability' (chapter 9), 'Dental pathology in early anatomically modern humans' (chapter 10), 'Hunting pressure' (chapter 11), 'Wetland drainage and the impact on avian fauna' (chapter 12), 'Utilizing avifauna in assessing changing patterns in paleoecology' (chapter 13) and 'Natufian behavior in the Hula Basin' (chapter 14). The topics together give a good overview, as the editors promised. It will go too far to discuss every chapter in detail; as a vertebrate palaeontologist I will focus my discussion on chapters 3, 4 and 8.

Bienvenido Martínez–Navarro, who did a lot of work in Venta Micena, Spain, wrote chapter 3. The chapter is about hippos, pigs, sabre–toothed tigers, monkeys, and hominids: dispersals through the Levantine Corridor during Late Pliocene and Early Pleistocene times. What attracted my attention was the sabre–toothed cat *Megantereon whitei*, with an African origin. It is claimed that Venta Micena has a *Homo erectus* with an age of about 2 Ma. The *Homo erectus* only can come from Africa, as there is no *Homo* of that age in Europe. So, the species *Megantereon whitei* is an important indicator to show that '*Homo erectus*' from Spain (Venta Micena) is coming from Africa. The carnivore fauna from Ubeidiya (table 1) seems to be a normal Villafrancian assemblage as they are known from western Europe. In this assemblage the sabre–toothed cat *Megantereon cultridens* is present. However, all sites with *Megantereon* fossils, which are determined by Bienvenido, including Venta Micena, Dmanisi, Apollonia, the fossils are classified now as *Megantereon whitei*. Furthermore, Bienvenido even suggests that the sabre–toothed cat *Megantereon cultridens* from Untermassfeld (Germany) is *Megantereon whitei*. It is more reasonable that the sabre–toothed cat in Ubeidiya, Dmanisi, and Apollonia is *Megantereon cultridens* as in other western European sites.

Adrian Lister wrote chapter 4, which topic is the ecological interactions of Elephantids in Pleistocene Eurasia: *Palaeoloxodon* and *Mammuthus*. The idea that (p. 57) "*Palaeoloxodon antiquus* can be seen as an ecological replacement for *Mammuthus meridionalis*, and the disappearance of the latter at roughly the time of entry of *Palaeoloxodon antiquus*" seems to be very reasonable, as more woodland came up in that period.

Chapter 8, written by Daniel Dor and Eva Jablonka, with the heading ‘Culture and genes in the evolution of human language’, is in itself an intriguing paper. They gave (p. 105) “a theoretical model of the evolution of human language in which genetic evolution follows, rather than precedes, cultural evolution”. Although it is a nice model, it does not belong in the book on the Levantine Corridor, as it is a general model and applicable to all parts of the world.

The figures and tables are clear, with the exception of figure 1, based on the general bathymetric chart of the Oceans in chapter 9. As the figure is in black/white, the elevations or the depths are difficult to see, because of the small differences in ‘colour’ of the different depth. In general, the one who is interested in the Levantine Corridor, should take a look at this publication.

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