

CHAPTER 4

Prehistoric population of the Balkans: an enigma no more

There is no dispute about the fact that the Balkan Peninsula has been inhabited since very ancient times. The oldest remains from humanoids on the European continent so far have been discovered in a cave in Northwestern Bulgaria and are reported to date some 1.1 to 1.4 million years back. The Franco-Bulgarian archaeological expedition is still at work and is expected to report on whether or not this might be a new, previously unknown species, linking *homo erectus* and *homo fabris* with *homo sapiens*, or is it perhaps simply mankind's oldest remains in Europe. Amazingly, among the multitude of finds there features an animal bone fragment that bears signs of advanced human activities, photo 4.0. These groups of parallel running cuts, performed by a sharp flint splinter, are interpreted by many scholars as constituting the first distance-measuring instrument (ruler) or perhaps the first etalon for length. In any case this certainly is mankind's chronologically ascertained first proof of symbolic, abstract thinking!

Several caves on the present day territory of Bulgaria as well as other Balkan countries feature troves of bone fragments, flint tools and cave-wall drawings. Some are dated back to the time of the *Neanderthals*, with the most ancient estimated to be about 200 000 years old. Elsewhere fossilized remains of wooden pillars-supported lake dwellings of *homo sapiens* are established to have been inhabited some 30 000 years ago. Other tools and bone fragments originating from about the same period are abundant in the upper cultural layers in some caves, with the oldest going back to 45 000 years before present time; all of these making the Balkans the earliest inhabited by humans spot on the European continent. The presumption that the straight of Bosphorus – a barrier to the *hominids* coming from their native Africa – did not exist as far back as 7500 years ago, a proposition of highest probability as will be touched upon later, adds to the claim that the facility for occupying that Garden of Eden on Earth and populating it with vigor, enjoying its abundance of resources and developing rapidly, existed since ever and WAS utilized by humans from the very first time they set foot there. Hence this was **the gate** from Africa to Europe, and there it has all started.



Photo 4.2
Swastikas, 6th millennium BC



Photo 4.3 Zoomorphic
pottery, 6th m. BC



Photo 4.0 Mankind's oldest signs of
abstract thinking, 1.1-1.4 million years
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