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Review by Kinsey Oleman-Grace

The essays presented in this collection explore the impact of human dispersals on landscapes, environment, and other species. The contributors come from a range of disciplines, including archaeology, genetics, history, geography and biology. They discuss human dispersal and species movement from the Pleistocene through the Holocene, examine coastal and sea routes, and address the movement of invasive and disease species. The novel approaches of some of the contributors are certainly ones which should be introduced to paleoanthropology curriculum. There are some notable examples.

In Chapter 2, Lewis explores the various exploitable niches created by extinctions of larger carnivorans, as well as the extinctions that hominins may have played a role in, and how climate changes impacted on both hominin and carnivoran species.

In his chapter on Pleistocene dispersals, Dennel examines how the reaction of prey species to hominins impacted the patterns of various dispersals. He examines the shortcomings of the biogeographical approach and argues that discussion of Homo sapiens dispersal requires analysis of the impact of the social networks that they would have established. It is rightly pointed out that while this approach works when discussing herbivores, it cannot necessarily be applied to hominin species with their unique and significantly changed behavioural capabilities of the past 2 million years.

Petraglia’s contribution focusses attention on appearance of Anthropogenic impacts in the Pliocene and Pleistocene. While on a different scale to later—post 50,000 ka—transformations, Palaeolithic, bipedal, meat-eating, stone tool makers had varying impacts on their environments and should not be viewed as passive actors on the environments they occupied.

In Chapter 5, Drake and Blench present definitions and evidence for mechanisms through which other species impacted on Homo sapiens dispersal into and beyond the new savannahs of the Sahara during the last two interglacial humid phases. Their introductory study demonstrates how a multidisciplinary approach—combining fossil and archaeological evidence with molecular phylogeny and synchronic ethnography—can help reveal modes of human dispersal.

In his essay on maritime human dispersals, Erlandson discusses the deep history of seafaring and maritime adaptations and the ecological ‘sweet spots’ that mangroves, coastal estuaries, and kelp...
forests offered humans. Indirect evidence indicates seafaring behaviour by at least theLate Pleistocene, and Erlandson posits the potential development of boats between 125 and 55 ka, and while the post-glacial sea level rise has impeded archaeological visibility of the exploitation of coastal habitats, *Homo* was very likely closely tied to aquatic habitats for the past 2.5 Ma.

The regionalist approach to the Holocene histories of Australia, New Guineas and Island Southeast Asia, is challenged in Chapter 7. Denham presents a multidisciplinary approach—including examination of human-aided plant and animal species dispersals—that evidences the long and dynamic interconnectivity of humans in these regions.

Many of the writings address the ‘push’ or the ‘pull’ factors that drive dispersal migrations. The contributors discuss some ‘pull’ factors being attractive resources, especially in regions with naïve fauna, environments which became attractive during warmer or more humid periods, and resource rich coastal foraging ‘sweet spots.’ Some ‘push’ factors discussed include climate changes such as colder or hyper-arid periods and population pressures that came with increased fertility under agricultural regimes. The contributors suggest the concept of ‘corridors’ for hominin dispersal, including a savannah corridor and the kelp and mangrove corridors.

Also discussed are the various barriers to dispersals driven by these ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, which played a larger role in the earlier stages of human evolution. Over time, human technology and culture turned previous barriers into corridors. The contributors also explore how this human ability to expand across these barriers mediated the dispersal of other species: animal, plant, and microbe. These species movements have been both intentional (resources) and unintentional (diseases and co-distributed species), and intentional dispersal involved the transportation of wild as well as domesticated species.

This book would be an important addition to research library collections supporting biological anthropology, paleoanthropology, palaeolithic archaeology, zooarchaeology, geography and biology research students. Most notably, Lewis, Dennel, and Petraglia’s contributions, deserve due consideration for their potential use in masters level paleoanthropology curriculum.

- Kinsey Oleman-Grace